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Roots and Branches

Periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

"What we have heard and known
we will tell the next generation."
Psalm 78

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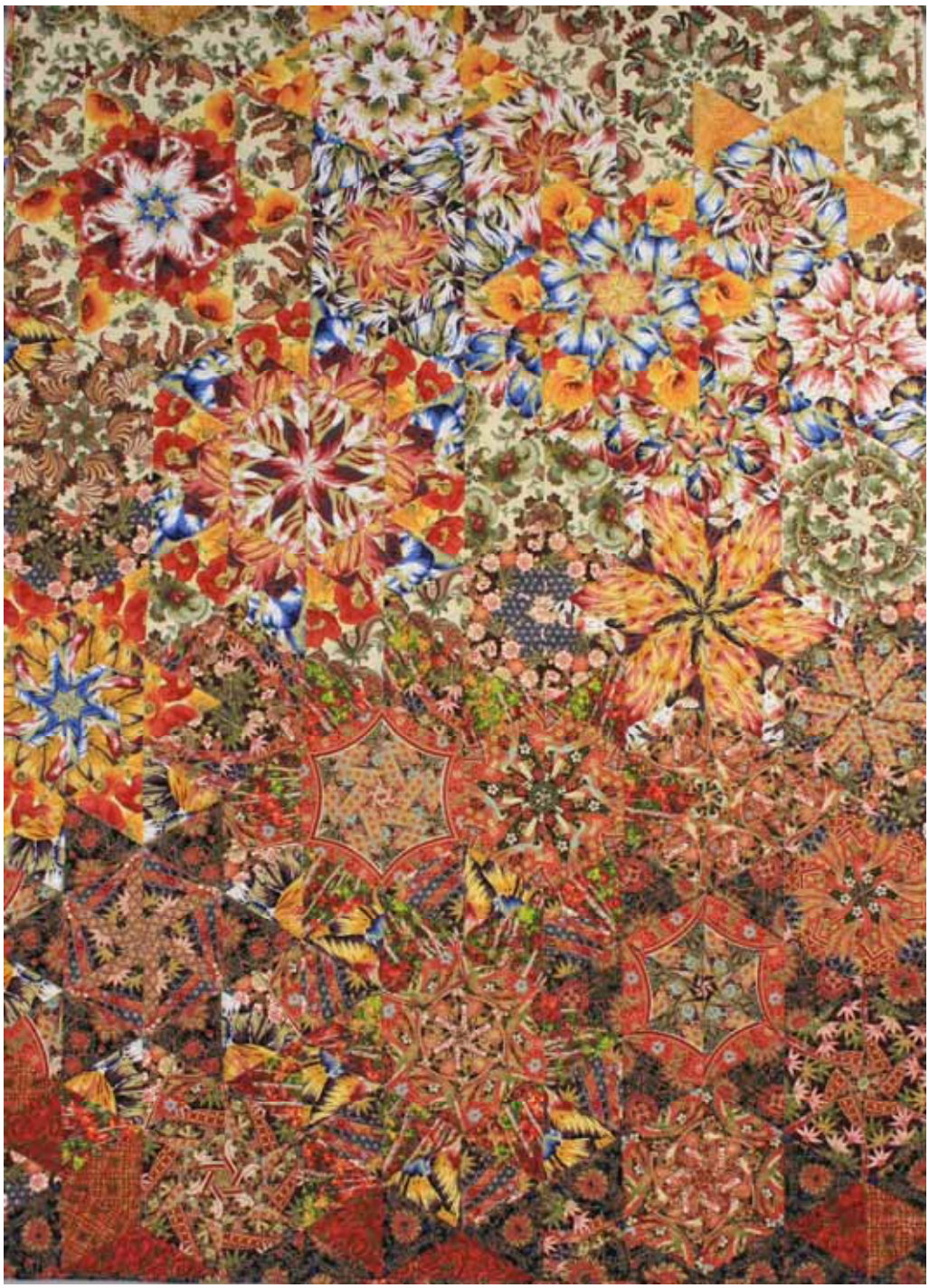

Flower Power, quilt by Lois Klassen

Editorial

By Maryann Tjart Jantzen

Immigration, especially during times of conflict and change, is often a complex process. For some immigrants it's a doorway to a prosperous and fulfilling life; for others it means a wrenching separation from loved ones; for some it may mean feeling alien in a seemingly unwelcoming new land; for those resistant to change it's often about trying to recreate cultural traditions in a new context. And for others, like my father, it may translate into lifelong loyalty to one political party. I remember well how my Mennonite father, who escaped Russia on one of the last trains out of Moscow in 1929, was determined to always vote Liberal in federal elections, since it was "the Liberals who let us into Canada."

This issue of *Roots and Branches* provides different lenses through which to view Canadian Mennonite immigration experiences and situations – while perhaps also shedding some light on the challenges current newcomers to Canada may confront. Wilf Penner's last instalment in his series on Mennonites in Canada traces the complicated aftermath of immigration – the shifting and settling and transitions made by Mennonite immigrants, some by choice and some by necessity, as they settled in areas newly opened to settlement and in already established areas. We also read of how Russian Mennonite immigrants settling in Yarrow, BC, tried to reinforce traditions and behaviours by establishing a common pasture and by policing the behaviour of community members, for example, by attempting " to control elementary school education by the church" and creating "church-structure and practice that reinforced Russian cultural practices."

A different angle emerges in Robert Martens' revisiting of the 1925-1926 bizarre Friesen-Braun trials that took place in Saskatoon; his article not only gives an account of skulduggery and deception within a Russian Mennonite immigrant community, but is also a reminder of how the actions of an unsavoury few can tarnish the reputation of their immigrant peers in the minds of the dominant culture. Adding a lighter touch, Helen Pauls' story of Mary Kroeker's return to the Berry Flats fruit cannery, now repurposed into the funky Cannery Coffee Shop, is both humorous and poignant, as the elderly Mary is reminded of a defining moment in her past.

Giving us both entertaining and educational glimpses into the many variables at work in the historic Canadian Mennonite immigration/resettlement process, this issue also reminds us of the cultural and economic challenges faced by newcomers, especially those fleeing traumatic experiences of violence and displacement. May we always remain aware of the importance of extending kindness and acceptance to newcomers to Canada as they negotiate the process of building new lives in a new land.

Note from the editorial staff

As there has been some confusion on the issue, we would like to clarify the distinction between the Mennonite Heritage Museum (MHM) and the Mennonite Historical Society of BC (MHSBC). The Mennonite Historical Society is a tenant within the Mennonite Heritage Museum building, and occupies the basement and second floor. MHM and MHSBC exist legally at arm's length. Even though volunteers may at times work within either organization, funds and fundraising remain strictly separate. The Mennonite Historical Society is not supported financially by the Museum and depends completely on community funding. We at the Society ask for your continued support.

Upcoming Event: A Lecture by Abraham Friesen

Sponsored by Mennonite Faith and Learning Society (MFLS), Dr. Abraham Friesen will speak on "Menno Simons and the Reformation" at 7 pm on January 27, 2017, at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, 3471 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford, BC. MFLS promotes Mennonite Studies and Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of the Fraser Valley and at Humanitas: Anabaptist-Mennonite Centre for Faith and Learning at Trinity Western University.

Abraham Friesen, professor emeritus at University of California, Santa Barbara, is a specialist on Reformation and Anabaptist studies and is considered an authority on Reformation rebel Thomas Müntzer. Friesen is a prolific writer and lecturer: among his works are *Reformation and Utopia*; *Thomas Müntzer*, *a Destroyer of the Godless*; *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission*; and *In Defense of Privilege: Russian Mennonites and the State Before and During World War I*. At present he is working on several projects, among them *Rendering to Caesar What Belongs to God* – a major study of Church and State relations in the early Swiss Reformation.

Dr. Friesen has published some eighty essays, articles, and chapters in various scholarly venues, and has lectured extensively in the United States, Canada, Germany, and Paraguay. Friesen's skills as researcher and speaker are widely admired. His lecture in Abbotsford should not be missed.

Event Reports - Letters from the Soviet Union during the Khrushchev Thaw

By Helen Rose Pauls

Those who braved the pouring rain to attend the MHSBC fall fundraising event at King Road Mennonite Brethren Church on November 13th were well rewarded. Being able to sing evocative songs such as "O Power of Love," "*Gott ist die Liebe*," "*Wehrlos und Verlassen*" and "*Wiedersehen*" in both English and German with 180 others is a treat in itself. To hear these songs enriching a text about a watershed time in our history was doubly pleasing.

An information blackout existed for the Mennonites who fled to Canada after the Second World War, since it was illegal for citizens of the Soviet Union to send or receive letters. Communication between loved ones separated by the conflict was virtually non-existent. And then in 1956, Khrushchev made his famous "Secret Speech" denouncing Stalin, accusing him of terrorizing the country, of enforcing disastrous relocations of individuals and entire peoples, and in general of ruling with extreme brutality. A million prisoners were freed from the slave labour camps, and for those who stayed, conditions improved. Suddenly it was legal to contact the west.

Ian Funk and Larry Plenert.
Photo by Amy Dueckman

Many of us remember hushed conversations in the mid-fifties, when letters began arriving after 12 years of silence, and remarried uncles or aunts with new families discovered that their spouses were still alive in the Soviet Union. The Canadian Mennonite newspapers *Der Bote* and *Mennonitsche Rundschau* suddenly carried pages and pages of *Suchanzeige* (Mennonites in the Soviet Union seeking relatives in Canada). Letters began to fly across the Atlantic as family members heard of each other's fate. There was great joy and great sorrow. Some letters, written in Low German and unsigned to evade censors, described the horrors of the slave labour camps, the brutal work conditions, and the near starvation and deaths of so many of those left behind. There was great hope of another mass migration to Canada and a few family members managed this, but the Cold War put an end to these dreams of reunion, and many relatives did not see each other until years later.

During the program, Louise Bergen Price presented two moving stories: one of her father finding the whereabouts of his siblings during the 1950s, although they were not able to visit together until 1993 in Germany, and the second describing the brutal life of her grandmother Elizabeth Bergen, who surely lived in and survived some of the worst conditions in history. In addition, Ruth Derksen Siemens described recurring themes in the letters sent across the ocean to Canada. Many immigrants searched for lost family members: "Please send a "*Lebenszeichen"* (a sign of life), asks someone whose nine children vanished without a trace. Others mourned disrupted marriages: "How could you marry again when you had no certificate of death?" There were masked messages such as Bible verses (e.g., citing Psalm 137 which talks about the wicked, in this case the Russian perpetrators, perishing) or the use of the single letter W, in this case meaning *Weihnachten* (the forbidden Christmas holiday). Hope for emigration was high in some of the letters, while others told of improved living conditions: "We hope to butcher a pig." "The Bibles and hymnals you sent were received."

Robert Martens described Krushchev's famous speech and its happy aftermath as some reunions occurred. A poem by Polonsky set to music by Rachmaninoff and sung by Ian Funk told of the anguish when reunited loved ones had changed too much for togetherness. Congregational singing was led by Ian Funk with Larry Plenert on the piano. A highlight of the afternoon was "*Der Lindenbaum*" (The Linden Tree), sung by Ian Funk and a video clip of Lale Andersen singing, "*Es geht alles vorüber*" (There's an End to Everything).

Richard Thiessen, chair of the Mennonite Historical Society of B.C., reminded us that the event was a fundraiser and that although the Society is enjoying marvellous new offices in the Mennonite Heritage Museum, costs remain high. He described some of the services MHS provides for the Mennonite constituency: professional storage of church and school records; recording of genealogies; storage of digital photos, among many others. Most importantly, perhaps, is keeping alive stories that tell of our legacy of faith and inspire us to live out the Anabaptist tradition.

A sumptuous *Faspa* concluded the afternoon (Low German for a light afternoon meal), together with much visiting, reminiscing, and sharing of family memories.

The Mennonite Church in Siberia Today: Part I
Peter Epp Lecture, October 23, 2016

Reported by Louise Bergen Price
Photos courtesy Peter Epp

For Peter Epp, church leader and historian living in Siberia's Omsk region, the years 1987/88 have special significance. Prior to this time, the 2,306 members of the Omsk Brotherhood, an association of Baptist and Mennonite Brethren churches, were forced to meet in private homes, often in secret. Secretary General Gorbachev's reforms, which included freedom of religion, brought about renewal and a flurry of building. The next 10 years saw the building of 15 new churches and the remodelling of 36 other buildings to use for worship.

But Gorbachev's reforms also brought freedom of movement. Within a few short years, thousands of German-speaking inhabitants of Siberia emigrated, mostly to Germany. Many churches, including Epp's home church, lost a large percentage of their members. A major reason for emigration was the economic instability, with its accompanying food shortages, that followed the break-up of the Soviet Union. In spite of these challenges, Peter Epp and his family decided not to leave. With his characteristic dry humour, Epp explained that he had made an agreement with God. If God would provide for his family, he in turn would do all in his power to work for the church. Whether God was pleased with the outcome, Epp said, he didn't know. But he did know that he and his family had never suffered hardship.

Epp's optimism and faith were justified. Since the mass migration of the early 1990s church attendance continues to grow. Presently there are 1,450 members worshiping in 55 churches. Many churches now are fuller than when people began to leave. The new members are not just from a German background but also include many of Russian and other ethnic descent. Most services are held in the Russian language.

Epp's lecture painted a positive image of life in the Omsk region of modern day Siberia, of an active church with members committed to bettering the life of those who live in the surrounding area. Participation in church

Book binding operation in a home.

Baptism in the river.

life goes well beyond Sunday service attendance or choir practice. The Omsk Brotherhood has its own printing press and a mobile library, and it supplies schools and local libraries with religious books. It also hosts summer camps for young people, holds tent revival meetings and provides emergency food for those in need.

Peter Epp was an engaging lecturer. For many of us, the fact that he spoke in Plautdietsch (Mennonite Low German, translated into English by John R. Redekop) was an added bonus and gave extra zest to his storytelling. Since the event was part of Clearbrook MB's regular Sunday evening service, the lecture was fairly brief, and Epp's focus was on church work rather than on the Mennonite community as a whole.

More information on the Omsk Brotherhood can be found at http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1455/1443

Sharing at a villager's home.

The History of Mennonite Settlement in Siberia: Part II Peter Epp Lecture, October 24, 2016

Reported by Robert Martens

One day later, Siberian Mennonite church and community leader Peter Epp spoke at the Mennonite Heritage Museum in Abbotsford. The topic of his talk was the history of Mennonite settlement in Siberia. Once again, Epp spoke in Low German, ably interpreted by professor emeritus John Redekop. Epp is fluent in Russian and Plautdietsch but facility in High German among Siberian Mennonites has suffered from lengthy disuse. His PowerPoint demonstration, however, was nearly exclusively in High German.

When he was a boy, Epp remarked, Low German *was* German. He is among those Mennonites, he said, who have *chosen* to remain in Russia rather than immigrate to Germany, as so many have done. Even as a boy, Epp was fascinated by who the Mennonites were and how it happened that they came to settle in Siberia. Many years later, his historical interest has resulted in two lengthy Russian-language volumes on the story of Mennonites in Siberia. Epp does not normally lecture on Mennonite history, he said, and voiced his hope that he was not boring the audience.

Peter Epp. Photo by Louise Bergen Price

Siberia was first settled by nomads, said Epp. At the end of the sixteenth century, the warlike Cossacks arrived and established forts in the area, the largest being on the site of what is now the city of Omsk. In 1895 the Russian government built a railway to Omsk. Subsequently, the area was rapidly developed: Mennonites were among the first settlers – they were like bees or ants, joked Epp, "always getting in there." In 1906-7, Pyotr Stolypin, a high functionary in the Russian regime, arranged the settlement of landless German speakers in the Omsk area. Mennonites arrived by the hundreds, getting to work within hours of their arrival. They eventually constituted about 22% of the German-speaking villages in the Omsk region, while Lutherans numbered about 56% and Baptists, 5%.

The early years were difficult for Mennonites. The year 1914 saw the greatest influx of Mennonites to Siberia. They lived in sod huts with reed or straw roofs; children had to share the burden of labour. The hardships were augmented, said Epp, because the grains grown by Mennonites were not in great demand. Eventually, however, the settlers discovered that a butter industry paid much better. The military purchased enormous amounts of butter from Siberian settlers, and prices quickly escalated.

The lifestyle in Siberia, said Epp, never equalled the prosperity Mennonites had achieved in Ukraine. Anti-German sentiment was increasing, and Russian newspapers raised the alarm that Siberia was being occupied by a German population that was potentially dangerous. Then the First World War and the Russian Revolution intervened. Eventually many Mennonite religious, business, and educational leaders were arrested and banished.

Somehow, however, Siberian Mennonites managed to survive the violence of revolution and civil war, the hostility of the Bolsheviks, and the Stalinist terror. Presently, Mennonites who have chosen to remain in Siberia appear to be thriving.

Mennonites in Canada: The Aftermath of Immigration

By Wilf Penner

This is the third article in a series of three by the author. See Roots and Branches *November 2015 and February 2014 for the first two parts.*

First immigrants arrive in Rosthern, 21 July, 1923. Pencil sketch by JJ Funk. (*Mennonitische Volkswarte*, 1935)

New arrivals, new organizations

Between 1924 and 1927 some 17,000 Russian Mennonite immigrants inundated western Canada.[1] Each of the approximately two thousand families had survived repeated trauma and loss in Russia and in their journeys to a new homeland. Many, perhaps all, were anxious as they looked into an unknown future. Their beginnings in a new land were often not auspicious: numerous immigrant families were forced to endure very substandard temporary housing on hosting Mennonite farms. Often these quarters were in granaries and barnyard buildings that had been cleaned and sparsely furnished for human habitation.

To be sure, the men and grown boys were usually hired to help with farm work, especially during spring and harvest, thus providing some income for the newcomers. The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization was eager to see them find permanent homes, but was already deeply in debt: it had undersigned the *Reiseschuld* (travel debt) contract for the impoverished immigrants with the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), which had supplied transport to North America. Solutions would have to be found for permanent homes on agricultural land for the immigrants, since the understanding with the government of Canada was that these newcomers would be employed in the agricultural sector.

Soon a welter of organizations was formed to help in this settlement process, sometimes with conflicting ideas and jurisdictions: the Canadian Colonization Association (CCA), a subsidiary of the CPR; the Central Mennonite Immigration Committee; the Western Canada Colonization Association; the Mennonite Land Settlement Board (MLSB); and Mennonite Immigration Aid (MIA). Some of their activities were redundant, and in the final tally the CCA and the MLSB were most successful in placing Mennonite immigrants on productive farms, although the Central Mennonite Immigration Committee, working with the CNR, was successful in settling some families in the Peace River region in 1928. The MLSB's function was to help the newcomers deal with Canadian English-speaking realtors. Contracts were signed by the individual newcomer farmers and the CCA. The contract terms were very lenient, with low down payments and lengthy repayment schedules.

Some leave, others take their place

The most easily accessible and already productive farm land was that of the departing Mexico-bound traditionalist (Old Colony and Sommerfelder) Mennonites from the reserve lands of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. However, not all of that land was available to the new settlers, since only about two-thirds of the village dwellers were leaving, and their leaving took some years to complete. Also, some of the traditionalist Mennonite farmers staying behind in Canada were buying up land from the emigrants to enlarge their own holdings. However, once the dust settled, ninety-three new Russian Mennonite immigrant families ended up in the Osler-Hague reserve villages in Saskatchewan, and about 191 families in the village lands of Southern Manitoba. The Southern Manitoba lands were the most favourably located and the most productive land available. The average price of this farmland was about $65 per acre. A complete replacement of emigrants with immigrants was achieved on 44,000 acres on the lands of the former East Reserve, with the help of American financiers.

A land-hungry people

Many more immigrants were searching for homes and more were arriving. Where could more farmland be found? Around the turn of the twentieth century, many land-hungry Mennonite farmers in the Midwest states took up homesteads on the Canadian prairies. Mennonites were not the only land-hungry people. Numerous wealthy Americans and other international investors were buying up large tracts of farmland, often in parcels of thousands of acres. However, by the mid-1920s many of these investors had come to realize that being absentee landlords and having hirelings managing farming operations was not an easy way to wealth, and were now looking for land buyers. It was to these large land holdings that the CCA and MLSB turned, working out various plans by which Mennonite farmers could acquire acreages for individual farms.

At Harris, Saskatchewan, one landholding of 5,588 acres was sold to a group of twenty families. Theodore Nickel, a wealthy Mennonite farmer in the Waldheim area, provided financing for the group. In another site at Lucky Lake, Saskatchewan, the Green Briar Farm, which included $156,000 worth of livestock and equipment, was divided into four units.

The Canadian Colonization Association worked out what came to be known as the "Mennonite Contract": purchasers needed no down payment and had up to fifteen years to pay the principal. The annual payments were based on the half-crop plan: in other words, after harvest, half the proceeds from that harvest would stay with the farmer while the other half would be applied to the mortgage. The interest on the principal was six percent per annum. In the case of crop failure, the loan payment could be postponed by one year, though taxes and insurance still had to be paid. The vendor was expected to make improvements such as houses and outbuildings, so that each unit would be a "going concern." Once the terms had been worked out, these farms were snapped up quickly. Usually the families of the purchasers lived communally for a set number of years, typically three, before each family was allotted its own half section of land. Fortunately, the first year these terms were in effect, 1925, was a very satisfactory crop year, and most annual payments were made; in fact some immigrants were able to make substantial inroads on their *Reiseschuld* as well.

Another huge landholding, the Lane Farm at Namaka, Alberta, was offered to the CCA and MLSB for colonization, with 12,265 acres available. The CCA decided to break the holding into three separate parcels, each leased to a group of twelve families, and by 1926, thirty-six immigrant families had been placed there. The settlers, however, encountered problems, some interpersonal and some financial. When there was extensive hail damage in the first two years of settlement, the terms of the mortgages had to be adjusted. The successes, though, outweighed the failures, and overall this huge development was deemed a success. There were numerous similar developments in all three Prairie Provinces, and a total of over six hundred families were placed on productive farms.

However, more farmland in less favourable locations had to be found to accommodate the remaining immigrants. One of those locations was the Battleford Block, which included places like Rabbit Lake, Glaslin, Fairholme, Meadow Lake, Mullingar, Glenbush, and Speedwell. In this region the soil was productive, but there was swampland to drain and bush to clear, as well as stony soil and colder winters. On the other hand, the initial outlay of money was not great and mortgage repayments could be spread over thirty years. Furthermore, the bush provided ample firewood and timber that could be used to construct crude cabins and barns. These lands were offered by the CPR in quarter-sections at $8 to $15 per acre, and it was hoped that one hundred homesteads would be established. The settlers came, but not one hundred families: only about half that number were willing to make their homes there.

Tractor covered in dust, 1930s, *Mennonitische Volkswarte,* 1935, p. 246.

When the Dust Bowl conditions in the south hit in the 1930s, numerous families left

what was now desert and occupied the remaining quarter section lots in the Battleford Block. Another area where land became available was the so-called Palliser Triangle in the southwest corner of Alberta, where rainfall was sparse and unreliable, but where farmlands were being irrigated with river water diverted into irrigation canals.

Sugar beets in Coaldale

When the $1.5 million plant of the Canadian Sugar Factory began operations near Coaldale, Alberta, in 1925, there was a demand for farmers and farm labourers. Mennonites were well suited for this new farm enterprise – they worked hard, were honest and reliable, and had large families which could provide hoers for this labour-intensive farming. The English-speaking people already residing in the area viewed this new industry as a risky innovation and were reluctant to get involved, and so there was room for the new Mennonite farmers to try their hand at raising sugar beets. Unfortunately, many disgruntled "old timers" were not happy to have these "foreigners" living among them.

For 255 Mennonite immigrant families, Coaldale thus became a testing ground: for the sugar beet industry, for irrigation farming, and finally, for multiculturalism. The experiment succeeded beyond all expectations. Typically, eighty-acre parcels of land were provided at $50 per acre, along with $400 worth of building supplies[2], to be paid for from the annual proceeds from ten acres of crop. These terms became known as Sugar Beet Contracts and became normative for land purchased from the CPR, as well as from private landowners.

The success of the sugar beet fields around Coaldale became the impetus for reopening the Eastern Section Irrigation Lands – places like West Duchess, Rosemary, Countess and Gem – to further settlement. This area called for individual families on quarter-sections (at least 120 acres). The settlers were advanced $1000 worth of equipment plus a 26 percent payment on four cows. The total price per farm was around $5000, to be repaid on a share crop basis. Around one hundred households established themselves here.

Northern Alberta

With the opening of a railway branch line from Edmonton to Grande Prairie, there was growing interest in settlement in northern Alberta. Settlement of Mennonites began in 1925 at La Glace and its surrounding area. Here the Canadian National Railway (CNR) and Mennonite Immigration Aid opened blocks of land to interested Mennonite immigrants. In this region, very fertile, weed-free land was offered in 320-acre parcels for a registration fee of $10. Repayment schedules again were long and affordable. The 1926 crop in the area was a bumper crop; farmers threshed as much as sixty bushels per acre. As news of this yield spread, so did interest in settlement. About sixty Mennonite households established farms around La Glace and Lymburn.

At about this time, conservative Mennonites from Southern Manitoba sent delegations to search for a "paradise" in Peace River country that would be more promising than Paraguay or Mexico, but they found nothing suitable. Only later, during the hard 1930s, did some of these Mennonites make their way to the Peace district. Russian Mennonites were now finding homes for themselves on the east and west fringes of the Prairie Provinces, in areas less reminiscent of the Ukrainian steppes.

Failures and successes in Ontario

Perhaps Reesor, Ontario, was the most interesting settlement experiment, though it ended in failure. This settlement, located on the Northern Ontario Railway in the Cochrane district about nine hundred kilometres north of Toronto, was named after Thomas Reesor, a lay minister among Ontario Swiss Mennonites. Reesor is located in the "great clay belt on the Hudson's Bay slope" (Epp 219) and was purported to be very productive, as had been previously demonstrated at an experimental farm at Kapuskasing. Land was offered by the provincial government in parcels of seventy-five acres at 50 cents an acre, and could be registered for a fee of $10, with three years to pay off the balance. The settlement was encouraged by Thomas Reesor, who had been very helpful to the new immigrants since their arrival in Ontario in 1924. Jacob H. Janzen, a popular Mennonite immigrant preacher and leader, encouraged it as well – he conceptualized Reesor as a settlement removed from secular distractions, where a village could be established on the same pattern as villages left behind in Russia.

The settlement took hold and settlers worked with a will to clear the boreal forest and to establish homes and farms. By the fall of 1928, fifty-five homesteads with 226 persons had been established. However, the work of clearing the land was backbreaking, the climate almost polar, the isolation extreme, and the location too remote from markets. Reesor survived the depression of the 1930s, but then went into a sharp decline that continued

into the 1940s. The United Mennonite Church, which had numbered seventy-five members in 1935, was dissolved on January 5, 1948.

Elsewhere, in southwestern Ontario, Mennonite immigrants settled before 1930 in Waterloo County, Essex County[3] and Pelee Island, and Niagara. Some of the immigrants who had been hosted by Swiss Mennonites around Hespeler, New Hamburg, Kitchener and Waterloo found the area to their liking – some were attracted by factory jobs in Waterloo; others began businesses; and some purchased farms ranging from five to one hundred acres around Hespeler and New Hamburg.

Essex County, on the peninsula between Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair, and the Detroit River, attracted immigrant families en masse: here there were earning opportunities in Windsor factories, and a strong demand for labour existed on vegetable and tobacco farms. Some Mennonites became involved in sharecropping for American owners on Pelee Island. The areas around Leamington and Harrow offered similar earning opportunities, and more than fifty families bought farms ranging from $100 to $1000 per acre. Others found sharecropping opportunities on tobacco farms. (Tobacco farming presented some ethical questions, but economic necessity generally trumped the ethical issue.)

In the Vineland-Beamsville area, Swiss Mennonites who had hosted recent immigrants from Russia introduced the newcomers to work in orchards and factories; this work became a gateway to economic self-sufficiency for a substantial number of Mennonite families. Some Mennonite farms were at first communally owned, but the idea of communalism was soon abandoned as families realized they could "make it" on their own. The densely peopled area of southern Ontario described in the previous few paragraphs became home for 972 immigrant Mennonite households.

Draining a lake in BC

Far to the west, in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia, a reclamation project had been underway since the early 1920s. Even before the turn of the twentieth century, the early farmer-settlers of the Upper Fraser Valley had been talking about reclaiming farmland from shallow Sumas Lake, which lay between Vedder Mountain and Sumas Mountain, but the cost of such a project was prohibitive. However, by 1921 engineer Fred Sinclair was working with the BC government to drain Sumas Lake; the result was Sumas Prairie. Although an objective of the drainage project was to provide land for returning

Tobacco kilns. p. 68. *Mennonites in Canada: a Pictorial Review*. Walter Quiring, 1961.

Canadian veterans from the Great War, much of it ended up being farmed by pacifist Mennonites.

A quick study of the beginnings of Yarrow might lead one to think that it was located on the newly reclaimed lake bed, when it was actually located on land immediately east of the lake. However, the reports in Canadian newspapers, including the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, about this reclamation project no doubt popularized the notion of starting a Mennonite settlement there.

Around 1910, when the construction of the BC Electric Railway (BCER) was underway, Chauncey Eckert, a Chilliwack businessman, purchased some one thousand acres on the eastern edge of Sumas Lake along the proposed railway right-of-way. In 1928 he offered seven hundred of those acres for "colonization." They were offered to Mennonite settlers in ten-acre lots at $150 per acre. The terms were $200 down, with the balance at $20 per acre per annum, at 6 percent interest. By the end of the year about fifty Mennonite families had arrived to make Yarrow their home. Chauncey Eckert was seen by them as a generous, kind gentleman, though he was also a shrewd businessman. Representatives of the CCA and the Mennonite Land Settlement Board were also helpful in making the Yarrow story a success, especially Peter P. Thiessen, who was appointed inspector by the Canadian Colonization Association to assist the new settlers with various facets of life in their new environment.

A continuing story

As might be expected, not everyone was happy in these first communities. Once conditions became settled and communications among the new communities were established, many readjustments were made. The economic depression and drought of the 1930s increased pressure on those in the hardest hit prairie regions, and led to re-

settlement elsewhere. Thus the "leftovers" in the Battleford block, like the Speedwell area, became new homes for destitute, drought-plagued refugees. However, most of the prairie Mennonites survived the 1930s without having to relocate: they eked out a meagre existence, and had lots of time to contemplate where they would move if they could afford it. By the mid-forties, with the recovering economy, many were able to move to new promised lands, either in the Fraser Valley in BC or Ontario's Niagara region – but that's another story.

[1] Another three thousand would trickle in by 1930.
[2] In other words, when the deal was signed, $400 worth of building supplies were delivered to the purchaser of each 80-acre farm, and then $400 was added to the principle of the mortgage, to be repaid annually.
[3] Essex County attracted thirty-one families in 1925 alone.

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Peter and Lisa Berg home, First house in Yarrow.
www.yarrowbc.ca/other/homesbuildings.html

The Friesen-Braun Trials

By Robert Martens

"Look here, HP [Friesen], why raise such a fuss over a trifling affair, such as this has been to me. You should have seen what I pulled in Russia. Why, not a drop of blood has been spilled yet. Before I am through here in Canada you will see greater things than this, accomplished by Isaac Braun. We need your paltry $5000 right now for organization purposes in this country, but much more money will be needed, and I will make you an offer, HP, that if you consent to pay me $3000 additional, making $8000 in all, I will see that you are placed on a list for protection, and no further demands for money will be made upon you" (witness statement by HP Friesen, in JG Friesen 9).

These words were allegedly spoken by Isaac Braun to HP Friesen in the Saskatoon CN train depot at 9:30 pm on March 30, 1925. They occurred near the beginning of a vicious dispute that would last until 1929 and result in a series of ten trials. The story of the Friesen-Braun trials was told in 1930 in a highly partisan book, *The Fangs of Bolshevism*, by George P. Friesen, brother of HP Friesen, one of the antagonists in the case. The book, however, is completely out of print and nearly unavailable; and despite the fact that the trials drew national attention and made legal history, they have been nearly forgotten. The title of George Friesen's book is symptomatic of the murky nature of the case: the story really has nothing at all to do with Bolshevism. Because of the untruths spoken by both sides and the implacable hostility between them, the genuine facts are exceedingly difficult to unearth, and the real story may have been forever lost. The outcome, however, was tragic for all involved.

A signed promissory note

Part of the flood of Russian Mennonite refugees, Isaac Braun arrived in Rosthern in 1924, when he was about forty, with his wife and two boys. Braun immediately began requesting a loan of $500 to start a farm, but with little success until he went to see HP Friesen, a businessman living in Saskatoon. Friesen had done well for himself in Canada, perhaps too well. Although a twenty-year member of the Mennonite church, he was known for his shrewd dealings, and seems to have been envied and distrusted. Furthermore, Mennonites had traditionally been suspicious of entrepreneurs who made good. Is it possible, given Friesen's reputation, that Isaac Braun early on picked out Friesen as a possible victim for fraud?

HP Friesen readily agreed to lend a hand to the poverty-stricken refugee. The two met with a lawyer named Hutchinson in Saskatoon, where they discussed Braun's proposal to buy an orchard in Renata, BC. Friesen naturally did not want to finance a property sight unseen and at such a distance, so Hutchinson suggested that Braun

travel to Renata, then write back to Friesen on the potential of the purchase. It must be noted that at this point Braun did not yet speak English, and Friesen acted as his translator. Hutchinson, who spoke no German, felt it more appropriate that the proposed letters from Renata be addressed to Friesen, who could translate and then act on the legalities involved. The lawyer had the address and legal details of the orchard typed on a yellow sheet of paper, as was commonly done at the time. At the bottom of the sheet, he had Friesen write his name and address; this was intended simply as necessary information for Braun's future letters.

As it later turned out, however, Braun would use the empty space in the middle of the yellow sheet to type a promissory note for $5000 from Friesen to Braun, with Friesen's signature at the bottom. Braun's fraudulent scheme was based on this story: he would later claim that he had smuggled $5000 into Canada beneath a board in his suitcase and that he had carried it around with him since his entry into the country. Subsequently, he would say, Friesen had borrowed that money from him in the lobby of the Western Hotel in Saskatoon and then signed a promissory note for that amount. This is all so implausible that it seems astonishing that the case ever made it to court. How could Braun have carried such a substantial amount in his wallet? If he had $5000, why was he making requests for a loan of $500 to start a farm? How is it possible that Soviet authorities would not thoroughly rifle through his suitcase and find the $5000? And yet...

Meanwhile, the case was just becoming more and more bizarre.

Unravelling

Isaac Braun travelled to Renata and wrote several letters back to HP Friesen asking his benefactor for the money needed to purchase the orchard. Friesen wrote back, and it seemed things were going rather well. In Braun's fifth letter, however, the tone abruptly changed. He wrote, "Dear friend HP Friesen: Advising you with this, that the $5000 from the 29th of August to the 29th November you borrowed from me, you can keep no longer. ... I want to start my own business now, and so need my money myself. Myself and two other citizens from here wish to start a sawmill, so do not hesitate and bring, or send my money at the stated date. Is. Braun" (JG Friesen 6).

Friesen was stunned; he thought that perhaps Braun had gone insane. He went to the Colonization Board in Rosthern to look for help, and met with chair David Toews, secretary A.A. Friesen, and Board lawyer A.C. March. As it turns out, a huge conflict of interest was present: March was also acting as lawyer for Isaac Braun, and A.A. Friesen had been a friend of Braun's back in Halbstadt, Russia. To his utter consternation, HP Friesen was told that Braun's request for the $5000 was reasonable.

It remains baffling to this day that David Toews, who accomplished so much, and at such great personal cost, for Mennonites fleeing the Soviet Union, would also take Braun's side – but he did. Perhaps it was personal: despite some intermarriage between the Toews and Friesen families, they did not get along. Perhaps it was overwork. Perhaps Toews was reluctant, for political purposes, to besmirch the character of a Russian Mennonite immigrant, considering it was now his life's work to bring as many refugees as possible to Canada (Friesen was not part of the 1920s immigration. He was a *Kanadier*, part of the emigration stream of the 1870s.). Perhaps it was a case of very bad judgement tinged with hostility. Publicly, David Toews was reluctant to speak, but privately, he admitted his confidence in Braun: "When Braun did not have money to bring his situation to court, I accompanied some brothers to support him," he wrote (Harder 155).

Matters just got worse. Braun was now claiming that more letters had been sent to him by Friesen, promising him the $5000, but that these letters were stolen during a break-in at his home in Renata. The claims were absurd, but the case was going to court. Friesen hired a lawyer. He became subject to attacks of anxiety and insomnia. He kept doggedly insisting that "[s]urely such things are not possible, in the twentieth century, right here in Canada" (GP Friesen 15).

Litigation between Mennonites

Trial #1:[1] Braun versus Friesen: February 24, 1925.
The ensuing first trial was a disaster for HP Friesen. Isaac Braun produced two young witnesses, Jacob Friesen, age 21, and Frank Hildebrand, age 16, who swore they had seen Friesen make the $5000 loan in the lobby of the Western Hotel in Saskatoon. Friesen was ordered by the court to return the loan along with $75 interest, and the sheriff immediately seized $2300 of Friesen's property in

bonds; the defendant would never see this money again. In addition, HP Friesen was excommunicated from the Mennonite church, an action that must have received formal approval from "Bishop" David Toews.

Meanwhile, the case was just becoming more and more bizarre. One day HP Friesen received a visit from two women strange to him, one of whom called herself Mrs. Rempelpein. At their request, the two were allowed to use his washroom. Afterwards, however, Friesen, fearing a poisoning attempt, dumped out the medicines in his washroom and had his daughter follow "Mrs. Rempelpein" home. Amazingly, the woman turned out to be the widow Theresa Friesen, mother to Jacob Friesen, one of the young witnesses who had testified to seeing the loan being made in the Western Hotel.

Boarding Minto Renata ferry at Renata.
Source: https://stakaialarsen.files.wordpress.com

The two boy witnesses, Jacob and Frank, were having second thoughts. Frank Hildebrand in particular had grown sullen and withdrawn, feeling desperately guilty for his role as false witness, and may have considered suicide. The two boys confessed their perjury first to HP Friesen and then to police. Strangely, though, the real turning point may have been when Friesen told the RCMP about his meeting with Braun at the CN station in Saskatoon, at which Braun allegedly threatened Bolshevik insurrection: "Look here, HP [Friesen], why raise such a fuss over a trifling affair? ... You should have seen what I pulled in Russia" (JG Friesen 9). Was there any truth to this account, or was it a mere fabrication? At any rate, the RCMP were now treating the case as having possible Communist implications.

Trial # 2**:** Perjury, Jacob Friesen and Frank Hildebrand. The trial ended quickly, with both Jacob and Frank receiving sentences of a few months in Prince Albert Prison. Jacob had been a student at teacher's college, but this imprisonment meant the end of any possible career. Meanwhile, Theresa Rempel, "Mrs. Rempelpein," confessed that she had meant to plant a fraudulent "sixth letter" from HP Friesen to Isaac Braun somewhere in Friesen's home when she had asked to use the washroom, but that under the family's close scrutiny had been unable to do so.

Trial # 3: Friesen against Braun to recover his money, 1925.
The case was receiving close attention in the media, and in particular from the two Saskatoon newspapers. Things were not going well for Braun. The *Daily Phoenix* reported a witness statement that Braun "had remarked that the Canadian courts were 'nothing,' he had seen other courts, where they hanged men" (GP Friesen 54). Braun was ordered to repay the money won from Friesen in the first trial. When Braun left the courtroom, he was arrested for subornation of perjury, that is, for counselling the two boys to commit false witness.

Trial #4: Braun's appeal, 1926.
Isaac Braun's claim that HP Friesen had induced the two boys to change their story to a false one was quickly dismissed.

Trial #5: Braun for subornation of perjury, 1926.
Amazingly, a great deal of money had been raised by Braun's supporters, and he was able to hire one of Canada's best criminal lawyers, RA Bonnar. The tide, however, had turned. The trial lasted fourteen days, after which Braun was sentenced to five years in prison. The case,

however, was not yet over. In his address to the jury, Justice Bigelow may have spoken improperly: "I do not see in the actions of HP Friesen since the first trial anything that can be commented on as improper, or anything you would not expect a man to do who had a great wrong done him" (*Daily Phoenix* cited in GP Friesen 161).

Trial #6: Friesen for perjury, 1926.
Braun had charged his opponent with perjury a few months previous. It seems odd that this case was even brought to court, but the jury only acquitted Friesen after hearing a great deal of contradictory evidence – in fact, evidence that had been brought forward in the preceding trials.

Trial #7: Braun's appeal on subornation of perjury, 1927.
Events were becoming ever stranger. Isaac Braun apparently received a hero's welcome back in Rosthern; supporters had put up $14,000 bail for him. Then David Toews' house burned down, and his five-year-old daughter died as a result. Some believed, incredibly, that HP Friesen had set the fire. And now the letters that Braun had claimed stolen from his house in BC mysteriously reappeared in fragments on his doorstep – they became known as the "mystery letters." These "documents" were laboriously reassembled at the Colonization Board office, with David Toews' apparent help. Most of these letters contained promises from Friesen to repay the $5000. One letter, however, implicated HP Friesen in arson. It stated, "There are two people among the gang, David Toews and Ens who are in connection with somebody. We, together with Heinrich Heinrichs, want to end the lives of these two: David Toews and Ens with fire" (JG Friesen 14). In other words, Isaac Braun was now trying to have Friesen charged with murder. The court eventually granted Braun's appeal on charges of subornation, but strangely not on the evidence of the "mystery letters," but rather because of the justice's prejudicial remarks to the jury at the previous trial (#5).

Trial # 8: Braun's second trial on subornation, 1928.
In his address to the jury, Justice Macdonald stated: "You are the sole judges of facts and I am glad of that, for during the 25 years of my experience in law I have never heard of a case with so much contradiction" (JG Friesen 15). The result was a hung jury.

Trial #9: Braun for fabricated evidence, 1928.

Top criminal lawyer, RA Bonnar.
Source: http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/bonnar_ra.shtml

A detective had searched Isaac Braun's home and found evidence of fraud regarding the so-called mystery letters. At the trial it was clearly demonstrated that these letters were falsified. Interestingly, one letter, actually written by HP Friesen, and then cut up and pieced together by Braun as a fraudulent document, did not reflect well on Friesen. "There is a certain Isaac Braun," Friesen had written, "who has forged my name and obtained from me five thousand dollars which I don't owe him. Would you be so good as to get signatures that he was with the reds in Russia and send me an affidavit to that effect? If you do this I will repay you when the opportunity offers. Greetings, HP Friesen" (JG Friesen 16). (The fraudulent letter did not resemble the original but had been radically altered.) In the end, however, Friesen finally won his case. Isaac Braun was sentenced to five years in Prince Albert Prison, and then ordered deported back to his native land.

Trial # 10: Friesen for forgery, 1929.
This was a last gasp attempt from Isaac Braun. He and his supporters had induced an illiterate and non-English speaking Mennonite named Bartsch to accuse HP Friesen of forging bank notes. The case was flimsy, and Friesen was quickly acquitted.

The human cost

It seemed that Friesen's fortunes had changed dramatically for the better. His excommunication from the church was reversed. David Toews called Isaac Braun "*ein Bösewicht erster Klasse*" (a first rate villain) and appeared at a public reconciliation between himself and Friesen at a church meeting in 1931 (Epp 217). And Isaac Braun, in a letter dated October 16, 1929, from Prince Albert Prison, confessed to his victim: "I wish to beg your pardon by writing this letter. It is my desire to adjust all my mistakes, because life is so short, and I feel I have to do so sooner or later" (JG Friesen 17). HP Friesen, however, never regarded Braun's confession as credible.

And lives had been ruined. J. Glenn Friesen writes of his great-uncle: "HP Friesen never fully trusted the church or religion again. He became known in our family as a kind of scoffer. ... [H]e lived a rather sad and bitter life. He spent his days in the train station, or by the escalator at Eaton's Department store, just being idle" (JG Friesen 18). Isaac Braun was deported, against the advice of many, to the USSR in 1933, a few scant years before Stalin's Great Terror. HP Friesen's brother even sent him money when it became evident he was starving.

Besides the human tragedy, some of David Toews' worst fears may have materialized. It has been debated how much the Friesen-Braun trials prejudiced public opinion against the incoming Russian Mennonite immigrants, but it seems to have been a factor. Of course the onset of the Great Depression meant that the doors would be closing anyway to further immigration, and conservative Mennonites had antagonized their Canadian neighbours with their persistent opposition to public schooling. And Stalin himself was shutting the doors to further emigration from the Soviet Union.

But consider the statement from the United Farmers of Canada to the plight of Mennonites clustered around Moscow pleading to get out of the USSR: "If the Soviet government is threatening to deport them to Siberia it is probably because they refuse to obey the laws of the country. ... We have our own troubles here with religious communities to obey the law of the country. They have recently caused considerable anxiety to the province and to the Dominion" (JG Friesen 19). Politics, and racism, to be sure, but the work of the Colonization Board had been made suspect by the protracted and nasty Friesen-Braun trials. The reputation of David Toews himself had been besmirched. The trials were the longest criminal case in the history of Saskatchewan and had cost the province $13,782.15, an enormous sum in those days. In the end, this moral tragedy probably influenced public opinion against further immigration by Russian Mennonite refugees. Were some, as a consequence, left behind to endure the holocaust of the Soviet Union?

[1]With the numbering of trials from 1 to 10, I am following the scheme used by J. Glenn Friesen in his paper.
Copies of *The Fangs of Bolshevism* are available in the library of MHSBC.

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A Russian Mennonite Village in Canada: the Common Pasture

By Robert Martens

Mennonites who had immigrated from Russia to Canada often attempted to transplant their "old country" experience to North America. Motivated by nostalgia for their previous homes and by the desire to preserve the ethnic and religious Mennonite community, they sometimes replicated in Canada the Russian village model they had left behind. This occurred among Mennonites in Manitoba and Ontario, but not so frequently in British Columbia. The settlement of Yarrow, BC was an explicit attempt to replicate as much as possible the model of the Russian Mennonite village.

When the first Mennonite scouts arrived in the Yarrow area, they prayed that God would make this place a Mennonite village. A prominent church leader wrote that, upon entering Yarrow in 1930, he had "this joyous warm feeling of having come home" (PD Loewen 76). It was a vision tinged with utopian longings. The intent was to recreate in Canada a relatively closed settlement such as Mennonites had experienced in Russia. The social, religious and cultural would merge as much as possible; social control would be a local concern; and the various needs of the village would be met by the village itself. The common pasture was one aspect of this transplantation of the Russian village into an alien land. It was a custom that stretched back hundreds of years.

The five- and ten-acre plots of land that the first impoverished settlers bought in Yarrow were insufficient for grazing and, in keeping with Russian practice, the locals decided to buy a large parcel of land for common pasture. Local entrepreneurs, the Mielicke brothers, had purchased a tract of land reclaimed from the bottom of Lake Sumas, which had been drained in the 1920s. It was from the brothers that the recently arrived Mennonite community acquired two hundred acres west of the village and near the pristine Vedder River. Each morning almost all the cattle in town were driven down Yarrow's roads to the pasture and in evening driven home again. Cows quickly learned where, on the return trip, to veer off to their own barns. Farmers took turns driving the cattle, watching them, and repairing fences when necessary. At times a local young man in need might be hired for the job. This was different from previous Russian custom, in which a non-Mennonite would have been employed. There was another difference: whereas in Russia, cows would be walked home for noon milking, this was not possible in Yarrow, where most of the population might be away at work in the hop yards or tobacco fields.

...in keeping with Russian practice, the locals decided to buy a large parcel of land for common pasture.

The common pasture was divided into three sections, one of which was grazed at a time, while the other two stood in recovery. An empty section was often used as a softball diamond by local boys, who were on occasion chased away by the town bull when the herd was moved into their playing field. At one point, the RCMP expressed safety concerns over cattle and people clogging up Central Road, the main street of Yarrow. A sand sidewalk was built, but when cows took to the sidewalk, the citizens of Yarrow promptly returned to the roadway.*

As Yarrow grew, increasing numbers of farmers bought twenty-acre plots of land and the need for the common pasture disappeared. It was eventually parcelled up and sold. Increasing affluence was wearing away the original vision of a shared Mennonite community.

*Jacob Martens, my father, posted an untranslatable ditty in German on a window of the lumber yard which he owned:

Lieber Leser, mark dir das!
Beloved reader, pay attention!
Geh auf dem Steg und nicht im Gras!
Walk on the sidewalk and not on the grass!
Das man dich ohne Müh
So that you can be easily distinguished
Unterscheiden kann vom Vieh!
From the cows! (Martens et. al 201)

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Some of the Customs Transplanted from the Russian Village to Yarrow

By Jacob A. Loewen

1. Common pasture complex. Village bull (*Darpsboll*) and cowherd (*Kouhoad*) (Low German terms).
2. Attempt to link local church and state for complete social control.
3. *Tsaddel* or *Zettel* (Low and High German respectively) as communal communication. A note (*Zettel*) regarding an upcoming marriage or funeral, for example, was passed down, house to house, through Yarrow's streets.
4. Gossip as a social control mechanism.
5. Village layout: small garden plot and yard, larger area behind. Yarrow had long streets with narrow properties and larger plots of farmland behind them.
6. *Ordnungsmänner* (in High German, "law and order group"). This group of men, often chosen from among those on the fringes of church culture, was hired as a "vigilante" group to punish adulterers, wife-beaters, drinkers, or other perceived sinners.
7. Attempt to control elementary school education by the church. The local Mennonite Brethren Church constructed two school buildings on the churchyard.
8. Nicknames as a social control mechanism. Nicknames were also common because of the many villagers who shared surnames.
9. Church structure and practice that enforced Russian cultural practices.
10. Public work bees.
11. Contact person to relate to/with national structure. Early Yarrow elected a local committee and unofficial mayor who oversaw the village and communicated with the "outside world." The "mayor" reflected the position of *Schulze* (High German) in the Russian Mennonite village.
12. Place of women. Although women often exerted some authority behind the scenes, they were expected to follow the male lead.
13. The German language. High German was used in churches or by the educated elite. Low German, a unique Mennonite dialect, was used elsewhere.
14. Russian Mennonite social control. For example, women's makeup and short-sleeved outfits were largely prohibited.
15. Attitude towards Canadian law – *domme Jesatze* (Low German, "stupid laws").
16. Dependence on physical beating, both private and public.
17. *Meddachschloop* (Low German, "afternoon nap").
18. Cooperative work.
19. Russian holiday system: *ieaschte, tweede, en dredde Heljedach* (Low German, "first day, second day, on the third the holiday"). Special days such as Christmas and Easter were celebrated over three days.
20. Russian Mennonite culture. Weddings, for example, were village-wide affairs. Visiting friends and neighbours was an almost official pastime.
21. The Russian split between Mennonite denominations was fostered. In Yarrow there were two churches: the Mennonite Brethren and the much smaller General Conference.
22. Social ostracism for the unwanted. Excommunication. Shunning.
23. The *Bruderkuß* (High German, "brotherly kiss"). Women also exchanged kisses.
24. Midwifery. In the Mennonite context it served as a social function. The midwife might determine, for example, how greatly a family was in need.
25. The abacus. Common in Russia, it was often used, for instance, in the Yarrow Growers' Co-operative Association.
26. The *Armenkasse* (High German, "fund for the poor"). This fund worked as a system of self-help in the community.
27. The Russian intervillage feud was transplanted. Yarrow felt itself in competition with other Mennonite communities. This even resulted in intervillage fistfights.
28. Practices of ordination. Deacons and ministers were ordained for life. At Yarrow's zenith, about thirty-five ministers sat in the Mennonite Brethren Church's *Vorberat* (High German, "high council").
29. Unpaid leadership. Early Yarrow did not put its ministers on salary.
30. The *Reiseprediger* (High German, "travelling preacher"). This individual was both evangelist and intermediary between Mennonite villages.

Jacob Loewen was born in 1922 in Romanovka, Orenburg settlement, Russia. After immigration into Canada, he received an education that was rocky and interrupted. Eventually he earned a Ph.D in anthropology and linguistics at the University of Washington. Loewen and his wife, Anne (née Enns), first served abroad as MB missionaries in Colombia. Jacob went on to work as a biblical translation consultant in South America and Africa. He died in 2006. Anne followed him in 2013.

Stories from Berry Flats: The Cannery

By Helen Rose Pauls

Mary Kroeker looked both ways where Clearbrook Road crossed South Fraser Way. The light was still red. She had pressed the button – hard – to bring the little white sign that told her it was safe to cross to life, and already her weak heart was pounding!

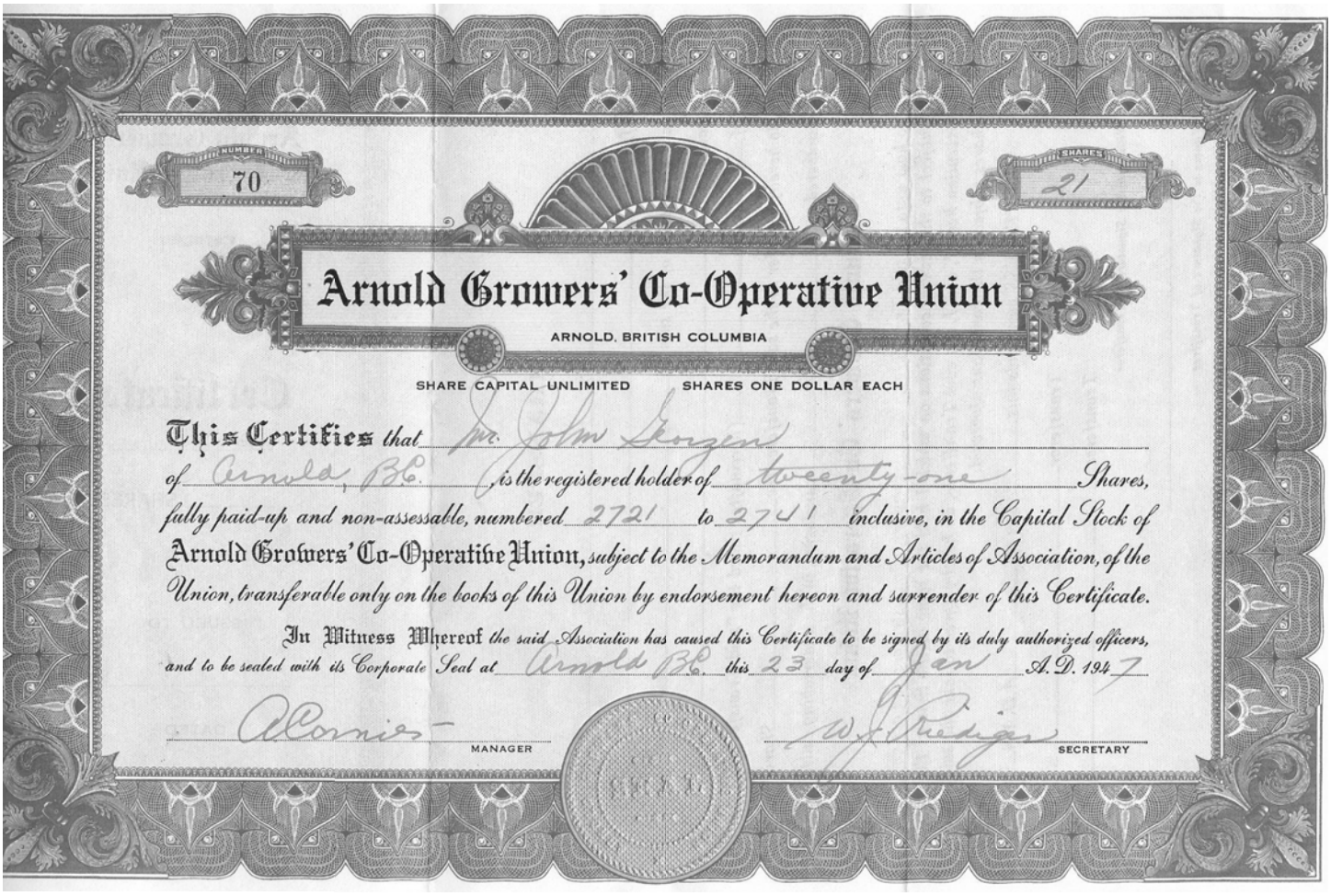
She must hurry already. Lily was coming to pick her up to take her to the old raspberry cannery that Germaine Geddert had turned into a coffeehouse. Margaret Neufeld and Tina Lenzmann had talked of little else as they all rode up the elevator together last week in their Clearbrook high-rise. All the old survivors, feeling as though they were living in vertical chicken cages, waiting for God to take them home.

"Just coffee. Imagine!" they had said, "in flavours yet and hardly any food besides." What was the young Geddert woman thinking anyway? Oh, she remembered the mother, Agnes Geddert, always behind when it came time to prune the berry rows; always a dreamer; imagine naming a daughter Germaine!

Could she get her old legs, just once more, to cross the street quickly enough before all those people in such a hurry started beeping and squealing their tires and turning menacingly close to her? Her feet poured over the sides of her sturdy black oxfords, size 10E, bought at Neufeld's Shoe Store before they shut the place forever. Three pair she had gotten when Lily took her to the "Closing Out" sale.

How these feet had served her in her youth! On her feet all day pruning, hoeing, pulling shoots, and picking the soft red fruit. Even through six pregnancies, she had persevered, schlepping the heavy berry flats to the shed, her little ones left in the care of Mother Kroeker. These young mothers today, making such a big deal about it all!

The light was changing. Oh no, her window of opportunity was short. She must move those tired feet one step in front of the other, steadily, toward the green light. Her head moved from left to right, anticipating fast cars disobeying the signal. Elma Wiebe had died just this


NUMBER 70

SHARES 21

Arnold Growers' Co-Operative Union

ARNOLD, BRITISH COLUMBIA

SHARE CAPITAL UNLIMITED SHARES ONE DOLLAR EACH

This Certifies that Mr. John Krogen

of Arnold, B.C. is the registered holder of twenty-one Shares,

fully paid-up and non-assessable, numbered 2721 to 2741 inclusive, in the Capital Stock of Arnold Growers' Co-Operative Union, subject to the Memorandum and Articles of Association, of the Union, transferable only on the books of this Union by endorsement hereon and surrender of this Certificate.

In Witness Whereof the said Association has caused this Certificate to be signed by its duly authorized officers, and to be sealed with its Corporate Seal at Arnold B.C. this 23 day of Jan A.D. 1947

MANAGER

SECRETARY

An official share certificate from the Arnold Cannery. Courtesy of Helen Rose Pauls

He stared them down, too proud to explain global markets he barely understood himself.

Funks' Supermarket. Source: GAMEO

way. Crossing the street on a green light on her way back from her weekly grocery shopping trip to Funk's. One hit – her hip broken – and in a few weeks she was gone.

Mary willed her ancient legs to move forward once more. Oh, oh, the light was changing! These heavy bags! She should have bought the smaller bag of sugar but the big one was on sale and what could she do? Quickly now. The curb was in sight. Gingerly, she stepped onto it, and with a gasp for oxygen, she made it onto the sidewalk. Behind her, cars whizzed by, their wind whipping at her blue kerchief. Safe once more!

Lily arrived soon after and helped her ancient mother-in-law into her Dodge Caravan. They drove slowly through the back roads to the cannery, snugged as it had always been, into Vedder Mountain. "Cannery Coffee," the sign proclaimed.

The stairs have changed, thought Mary as she forced her body out of the car, but the door is still the same: the old sliding one her Henry had entered every day, but with bold black hinges and door handles. Peeking inside, she saw that his former office had become a reception room, and before her was the huge open space that had housed the belts delivering berries to the girls employed on the night shift. Now the refinished fir floor was full of tables and chairs gleaned from garage sales and antique shops and basements, each one different in design and colour.

Mary thought back to those days and shuddered as she remembered Henry's euphoria when the cannery sold millions of pounds in the good years during the forties. He had pushed the Co-op members to add a storage shed, new trucks for hauling, and even a Dodge for himself, the manager. Then the British markets had dried up after the war; berries were stockpiled in barrels waiting for a vendor; members clamoured for payment and took side jobs to pay the pickers. Those who had invested in loan certificates to finance the berry plant began to call at all hours. Henry had gone into black rages, telling them not to pick the crop as there were no markets.

"It is up to us to pick the berries and up to you to sell them," they said. He stared them down, too proud to explain global markets he barely understood himself. He took the failure personally.

Meanwhile, as Lily surveyed her old workplace, memories washed over her. She entered the reception hall, and the huge cannery area turned coffeehouse, and remembered all the neighbourhood teenagers working together along the berry belt, sorting fruit. The air still seemed to hold the chant they had sung so long ago:

Jean, Jean made a machine,
Joe, Joe made it go,
Hank, Hank turned the crank,
Art, Art let a fart
And blew the whole machine apart!

Lily could see it now, the berry belt coming toward her from long ago. And coming toward her on the advancing red sea of berries was an Oh Henry bar. Why had no one picked it up? A chocolate bar was a novelty back then: perhaps a birthday treat or a Christmas surprise. Then she realized that all eyes were on her—some timid, some sympathetic, some mocking, some expressionless. And it came to her like a thunderclap! Henry Kroeker Junior, son of the cannery manager, had sent it down the berry belt like a secret code, but for all the world to see, and somehow everyone knew that it was intended for her. Her cheeks had flamed.

Henry Kroeker and his big mouth. Of all the boys in the village, he was the last one she would encourage: Momma baby, braggart, fool, getting the best job in the cannery because his father was the boss. Now she felt the gaze of her fellow workers. Glancing up, she caught Henry's eye as he grinned at her from the loft where the

cooperage barrels were stored, and she realized that he had spread lies about her. About them. Impulsively, she snatched the chocolate bar and hurled it up at him, into his face, shouting, "Pig!" Red-faced, she returned to the tedium of sorting berries and felt the room go quiet. A huge hand reached down into her sorting pail, going through the berries she had plucked from the line.

"Too many good berries in here," was all he said and Henry Kroeker Senior jerked his thumb at her to get out. To vacate her place on the line. To leave the premises. Fired!

Her stunned feelings did not register on her face. She gazed long and knowingly at young Henry. She held her head high as she slowly removed her apron and stepped back from the moving belt.

She told no one that, on the long walk home by moonlight, young Henry had come by in the huge berry truck and offered her a ride, sneering at her proudly. As she raced towards home, he threw out his ridiculous and trademark cap, with "Sweeney's Cooperage" in red on a striped grey background. It rolled into a ditch with the gust of wind raised by the huge tires, pitched like a broken and useless thing into the mud. Used. Dirty and useless as she would have been if Henry had his way with her.

Who could have foreseen that Lily would marry his older brother five years later?

Lily looked up to see her mother-in-law seated at the nearest table, shrunken and old. Maybe it was a mistake to return to the village of Berry Flats and the cannery, she thought, as she ordered a latté for herself and tea for her mother. Better to move forward and forget those difficult years.

Arnold Cannery interior. The fall work schedule included processing apples. It was a wonderful opportunity for women to gather and visit, and make extra cash for pressing household needs. Photo courtesy of Helen Rose Pauls

Abbotsford, the Tretheweys, Mill Lake and Mennonites

By Robert Martens and Clara Thiessen

The five-acre body of water known today as Mill Lake was once at the centre of economic life in the Abbotsford area. It was the logging industry located on its banks that attracted settlers to this part of the Fraser Valley and spurred the economic activity that would give birth to the city that now surrounds it. The Abbotsford Lumber Company, owned and operated by the wealthy Trethewey family, provided an opportunity for newcomers to earn a living while starting up a livelihood as farmers – and Mennonites were among them.

The Trethewey family traced their lineage back to Samuel Trethewey of Cornwall, England, who is said to have designed an internal combustion engine. The family seems to have had commerce in their blood, and the Canadian wilderness was, for them, an opportunity to make money: "Legend had it that when Samuel's sons inspected land they had pre-empted sight-unseen in Canada, they were shocked to discover that it was covered with nothing but trees" (Martens et. al 239). By the turn of the nineteenth century, the Tretheweys were involved in mining, ranching, and the hotel business in Ontario and BC. Their business activities eventually took some of them to Mill Lake – or Abbotsford Lake, as it was known at the time.

They were not the first. It was another well-known Abbotsford pioneer, Charles Hill-Tout, a noted anthropologist and education advocate, who started the first logging company at the lake. Early in the 1900s (the date is uncertain), the Abbotsford Lumber Company was bought by the Trethewey brothers: Joseph Ogle, who became the principal shareholder, and Richard Arthur, president. The business flourished. By 1920 it employed 260 men, who mostly lived in on-site boarding houses, "one each for the white, Sikh and Japanese single men, as well as cottages for families of each ethnic group" (MSA Museum 2). Although Asian workers were reportedly well-treated, and the company lent a helping hand in the construction of the Sikh *gurdwara* (temple) in 1911, employees of European origin earned slightly more per hour.

The mill site itself, known locally as Milltown, was not at all beautiful.

In the 1920s, the company was producing 20,000,000 feet of lumber annually. A network of railroads was built to haul the timber to and from the mill. Joseph Trethewey built a house with company lumber on the eastern banks of the lake; this beautiful heritage home still stands today, preserved under the auspices of the MSA Museum Society. The mill site itself, known locally as Milltown, was not at all beautiful: "As the mill ran twenty-four hours a day for the most part, dumped all its tailings and sawdust into the lake and was permanently veiled in a haze of smoke, no doubt Milltown was a singularly unpleasant place to live" (Museum 2).

In 1928, Joseph Ogle Trethewey died, and his son J. Edgar took his place. Business was now in decline. The area surrounding Milltown had been logged out, and the Great Depression that began in 1929 dealt a further blow to the Abbotsford Lumber Company. In 1934 the business was shut down: "As no cleanup other than salvage was undertaken, the shoreline was littered with debris and derelict buildings and the lake was full of saturated and sunken logs" (2).

Excerpts from "A Study of the Mennonite Settlement of Clearbrook, BC," by MHSBC volunteer Clara Thiessen.

The land on the north side of the Trans-Canada Highway, extending approximately one and a half miles east and west of Clearbrook Road [the current locations in 1958], belonged to a Mr. Trethewey, who operated a sawmill on Mill Lake. Prior to 1928 he had also been operating a logging camp on north Clearbrook Road... . Most of the large trees in the surrounding district were removed, but much underbrush and many logs and small trees still covered the countryside. When the first [Mennonite] families settled in Clearbrook, the logging camp was no longer in operation.

The first settlers, Mr. and Mrs. John Rempel, arrived in 1928. In 1931 Mr. and Mrs. George Wiens made their way to the wooded Abbotsford area, settling on Clearbrook Road.[1] Other early settlers were Mr. and Mrs. Abram Kroeker, and Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Friesen, as well as Mr. Henry and Mr. Nick Braun. There were no houses in which to live except in the old logging camp owned by Mr. Trethewey. He permitted these pioneers to live in his logging camp free of charge, where they also [had access to] free firewood, using the fallen logs which had not been used during the time of logging. One pioneer tells me that Mr. Trethewey allowed them to "sell" the logs that they

Trethewey House Museum today.
Photo: http://www.msamuseum.ca/

would not need, receiving in exchange not money but groceries. Money in those days was scarce; people welcomed every opportunity to obtain food where possible simply in order to stay alive. Those depression years affected everyone and the pioneers found it very difficult to make ends meet. ... (Thiessen 2-3).

After living on Mr. Trethewey's logging camp for several months or even a whole winter, the early pioneers chose the sites for their farms, buying twenty or forty acre parcels for $10 an acre. The poor quality land extending along the [Great Northern] railway track was sold for only $4 an acre. The story is told of a young man who wanted to buy land in the Clearbrook area. Upon hearing this, the reeve told him gently but firmly, "Don't be so foolish as to buy land here. Why, it isn't even good enough for a graveyard…." (4-5).

[T]he land was covered with thick bush and stumps which was left there from the logging days. Clearing the land was a slow, difficult task. ... The early settlers worked for years, clearing at first only enough land to plant a garden and to build a makeshift shelter until they earned enough money to build a house. On the average, through the use of axes and picks, the landowners cleared about one acre per year. Gradually the brush was cleared and stumps were burned, or later, blasted. ...

While the land was being cleared, it brought the farmers no income. Consequently, they had to find work elsewhere, but because of the depression, most of them barely earned enough to clothe and feed themselves and their families. During the time the sawmill at Mill Lake was in operation, many found employment there, most of them having to work for 37 cents an hour. Others worked in the hop yards near Chilliwack for thirty cents per hour from 1928 to 1930, with wages dropping to fifteen cents per hour in 1933. Still other men found employment with the municipal road construction gangs, worked in canneries, at Buckerfield's, or at the brick plant east of Abbotsford. In addition, in the mid and late 1930s, the women picked hops and berries in the summertime, and hoed berry fields before picking season began (6-7).

*

It was a hard life for nearly everyone in Abbotsford/Clearbrook, except for the fortunate few such as the wealthy (and philanthropic) Trethewey family. Nevertheless, the Tretheweys were pivotal to the growth of the community, and Mennonites were among those who benefited. A MSA museum report states, "It is hard to believe that Mill Lake was once a clear blue lake in the heart of a thick forest.

Although the changes the lake has undergone in the past hundred years may be considered negative in the context of today's environmentally conscious perspective, the growth and development of the community of Abbotsford would not have progressed as it did without the impact of the Abbotsford Lumber Company and the contribution of its principal, Joseph Trethewey, and his brothers" (3).

[1]Clearbrook Road developed from the Clearbrook Trail, which straddled the international border and led to a village called Clearbrook six miles south of the border. The village was so-named because of the "clear brook" near which it was located (Martens et. al 50).

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Hop pickers. Photo courtesy of Richard Thiessen

CBC series on Mennonite Drug Smugglers

By Robert Martens

Some Mexican Mennonite colonies have fallen on hard times. Prolonged drought and lack of sufficient land for the young – amid social problems such as the Mexican drug wars, poor education on the colonies, and excessive alcohol consumption among Mennonite adolescents – have resulted in a few Mexican Mennonites choosing to be involved in drug smuggling.

The Mexican colonies in Chihuahua and Durango states were founded by proud traditionalist Canadian Mennonites in the 1920s. The issues that led to their establishment were complex. Fundamentally, however, rather than accede to new government regulations on education, these Old Colony Mennonites elected to leave Canada en masse and establish settlements in Mexico, where they were offered self-control over their schools. Members of the Kleine Gemeinde community emigrated, also to Chihuahua state, after World War II.

In recent years, Mexican Mennonites crossing the border into Canada have been arrested in Alberta and Ontario when marijuana or cocaine was discovered hidden in farm implements. The media, of course, seized on the rather bizarre story: a pacifist sect involved in crime. Other stories on Mexican Mennonites have been ignored: improved education; adaptation to new crops and methods of irrigation; a modern Mennonite Credit Union in Cuauhtémoc; the use of brick rather than adobe in new dwellings; and a bustling Blumenau Mennonite Conference Church which is providing a bridge to modern secularist Mexican society. Nevertheless, reports of a "Mennonite mafia" appear to be genuine, if exaggerated.

And now a television series based on Mennonite drug smuggling is being filmed, according to reports, in Ontario and Nova Scotia. CBC press releases have announced that the series will be called *Pure*. It will focus on a Mennonite pastor, Noah Funk, determined to rid his community of crime. He betrays a Mennonite drug trafficker, Eli Voss, who in turn threatens to harm Funk's family if the pastor does not involved himself in a drug smuggling operation. Recently, American actress and community activist Rosie Perez has been added to the cast of *Pure*. The series will premiere in 2017.

Entertainment? Social commentary? Sensationalism? The public – and maybe the ratings – will decide on the answers to these questions.

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The Genealogy Corner:
The Ties that Bind

Sandi's Story

By Sandi (Hiebert) Massie
All photos courtesy of Sandi Massie

A growing interest in the past

My paternal grandfather, Johann Hiebert, passed away when I was in my first year of marriage. I was 21, and my interest in family history had not yet started. As I listened throughout the early years of marriage to some tidbits of stories coming from my maternal grandmother, I became interested in this Ukraine where both sides of my families had come from. The paternal side of my family, the Hieberts/Ungers, came to Canada during the second wave of the Mennonite migrations out of Russia (the 1920s). My maternal side, the Derksens/Goertzens, arrived during the third wave, after World War II. (The first wave occurred during the 1870s.)

Once I started having children, I felt that something was missing. I wanted to learn more about these families that I had come from. Why did they move from the Ukraine and why did some family members not come to Canada with them? I tried to get my maternal grandmother to tell me something about her life there. But it was too upsetting for her. Luckily for me, I did get sufficient information from her. I could also go back a long way with the data that my great-grandmother had written in a book intended for future reference.

Family photo.

L-R Back: Heinrich Huebert, Agata Hiebert, Abram Hiebert, Johann Hiebert (my grandfather) (Notice the spelling of the last names. There are two different Hiebert/Huebert families involved.)

L-R Front: Gredel Huebert, Liese Huebert (née Hiebert), baby on her lap: Heinrich Huebert Jr., Hilde Huebert, Elisabeth Hiebert (née Janzen) (my great-grandmother), Jakob Hiebert (my great-grandfather), John Hiebert (my uncle), Mary Hiebert (née Unger, my grandmother), baby on her lap: Abraham "Al" Hiebert (my uncle).

My paternal forebears and a family photo

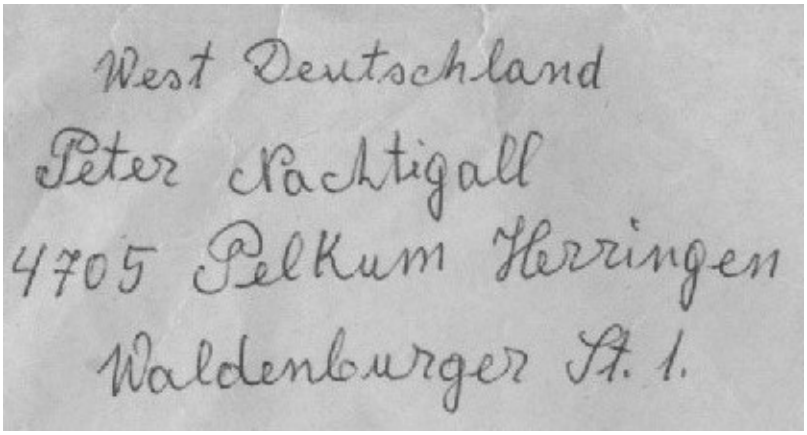
My paternal grandmother had passed four years after my grandfather's death, and all I had of my grandparents' things were some pictures and travelling papers. My oldest uncle had these papers in his possession until his passing a year after my own father's death. I was 32 and my last child, Amy, was 4 months old. My cousin gave the papers to my mother, and I kept those papers for many years, "just sitting" in an envelope. I would take them out and look at faces that seemed familiar, but I had no idea who they were. The only information given on the back of the following family photo was the first names of the individuals in the portrait. There was one spouse with no last name attached. My Grandfather Hiebert's siblings in this picture were not married. The photo was taken as my grandfather was leaving for Moscow with his immediate family and his in-laws. Two of my uncles, Johann and Abraham ("Al"), had been born in Waldheim, Molotschna Colony. My Uncle Peter ("Jack") and my father, Aaron ("Ron"), were born in Canada. My own father never talked of these families. Maybe it had been too painful for my grandparents to talk about them, since they never saw any of my grandfather's family again. I do not know the answer.

A letter provides important clues

Once I started volunteering at the Society in 2006, I started to learn of other sources of information on these

families. In the earlier days of my volunteering, I had time to do some of my own research. I started to compile small amounts of information. I would ask my colleagues for direction on where else I could look. Through their help, I found enough information to start putting the names and genealogy of the family together. The *Umsiedler* (immigrants from Russia to Germany) lists were the first stepping stone for information about family members who were sent to Siberia in the 1930s. My mother remembered my grandparents saying that these families – or their descendants – now lived in Germany. And among my grandfather's things happened to be an envelope with an address from Germany.

The name on the envelope was Peter Nachtigall, husband to Gredel, the oldest granddaughter of Jakob and Elisabeth Hiebert (my great-grandparents). So I looked at the *Umsiedler* lists, and there they were! The Nachtigall couple had one son listed, Viktor. They had immigrated to Germany in the early 1970s. Gredel's mother followed shortly afterwards. I knew from the family photo [above] that the two sisters' names – that is, the daughters of my Hiebert grandparents – were Agata and Liese. I did not know which was which. Once I had seen the name Elisabeth (Liese) on the *Umsiedler* lists, I then figured out that Agata was the younger of the two. But what had happened to her and her brother Abram? Both were included in the family photo. There were some pictures of Agata in the envelope with the last name of some of her children listed as Warkentin. So that was her married name; but whom did she marry? That last name stayed on the GRANDMA database (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry, which contains information on over one million individuals) as an otherwise unknown Warkentin for many years. Johann, Jakob and Peter were the three boys born to her marriage. No pictures of her husband were included in the database grouping.



Years later, a Mr. Koop from Reedley, California, sent in his family data for the GRANDMA database. I happened to see that he had mentioned an Agata Hiebert married to his Uncle Johann. Some of my maternal relatives live in Reedley, so I phoned my Aunt Gretel Warkentin, who resides in Reedley, and asked if she knew of these Koops. The Koops went to the same church as she did and she got his phone number for me. We put our information together and figured out that this was the family I was looking for. Another connection – but I could still not find anything on my grandfather's youngest brother, Abram.

Phone calls to Germany

My next attempt was going to the German online telephone book and starting to phone Peter or Viktor Nachtigall families in Hamm, Germany. (My search in Hamm, Germany began when I decided to do an online search of the place name, Pelkum-Herringen, listed on the envelope I had from my grandmother's things. Pelkum and Herringen are urban areas of the city Hamm.) I had my mother help me; she would talk first in High German to make initial contact, and then ask the person who had answered if he or she spoke Low German, since that language was easier for her. There were a few phones slammed in her ear but there were also a few individuals who wanted to help us out even though they were not related. We did talk to a Viktor Nachtigall who ran an architectural firm in Hamm. He was not interested in family trees but had a cousin who was interested in "finding family." Lily Epp was the name given. She was a daughter of Heinrich Huebert. In the picture, he is the young baby sitting on my Great-Aunt Liese's lap. That combination made it a bit confusing – a Hiebert marrying a Huebert from the same village. Viktor gave us an email address to contact her. Since I did not speak German, I would use Google Translate to express my wishes to her. My heart started to race as I thought, "How do I start the questions?"

Contact was made, questions got answered, and arrangements were made that the next year my husband and I, with some friends, would travel to Germany and meet with Lily's family. Pictures were passed between us and identifications were made of the individuals posing on the pictures that I had in my possession. Before we met, Lily's husband, Heinrich Epp, had made a family

tree book for the Hueberts/ Hieberts. He sent me the book by email. I discovered that my grandfather's story constituted only a single page; it was composed of pictures of my dad and his brothers but nothing more. I forwarded the family information I had to Heinrich and now we have our own chapter in that book.

Family sharing memories.

Meeting German relatives

Before we left for Europe, my cousin Lily had arranged a barbeque at her place for the Sunday of our stay; at this event we met almost all of her siblings except for a brother who was away on a conference, and her oldest brother who lived in Frankfurt and could not make it that day. We did talk to both via Skype, so we did kind of meet. We all sat at a huge line of picnic tables and just looked at each other. My dad's colour of eyes was staring back at me from quite a few of Lily's siblings. Cousin Peter, Lily's brother, possessed the Hiebert sense of humour. The Hiebert tallness could be seen in many of the children and grandchildren. Another day, I met with Great-Aunt Agata's boys. Two are still living; brother Peter had passed away a few years ago. The above picture is of our meeting with Johann and his brother Jakob. They are showing me pictures of their families and their mother. They had been sent to Ivanovka, near Omsk, Siberia, later to Kazakhstan, and then had finally left for Germany.

More research awaits

I eventually was asked, why did your paternal grandfather, Johann Hiebert, get out of Russia and others in the family did not? I told them what Grandfather Hiebert had told my mother: that his siblings and parents did not believe that anything bad was about to happen. All was quiet at the time. I felt badly for them; those who survived in Russia had lived a hard life. The youngest girl in the family photo died of starvation in Siberia. I learned that my great-grandfather was shot in the back in Kuzbek, Kazakhstan, in 1937. I learned that my great-grandmother died of stomach cancer in 1927. I also discovered that my only great-uncle, Jakob, was shot while running across a street to his family in 1919.

Most of my questions have been answered by this new family I have found. They knew nothing, however, of our great-great-grandparents. I did have names but that was all. There are two Jakob Hieberts entered in the Waldheim, Molotschna (Mennonite colony in the Ukraine) grain lists of 1863. One is my great-aunt's grandfather, and one is her husband's grandfather. The husband's grandfather did not pass until 1905; so the other listed Jakob Hiebert was my great-great-grandfather. Last year I discovered in *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* (a German-language Mennonite newspaper) that my great-great-grandfather was a preacher in the Neukirch Mennonite Church for 26 years, and a teacher in Hierschau for twelve years (both are villages in the Molotschna Colony). He had fourteen children; eleven of the children as well as his wife had passed by the time of his death in 1903. He lived to 70 years and 9 months of age. This information was written down by one of his grandsons, Abraham Siemens, who lived in Hierschau. But the question remains: how do I find the thirteen other children?

In conclusion, if you continue to search and never give up, the possibility of finding information is always there. But do not wait too long. Too often answers die with the generations. Gather the information now.

Abraham Friesen. *Menno Simons: Dutch Reformer between Luther, Erasmus, and the Holy Spirit. A Study in the Problem Areas of Menno Scholarship*. XLibris, 2015. 446 pp.

Reviewed by Ron Dart

Theories on the origins of the Anabaptist tradition are ongoing and contested. Ranging from monogenesis historical models based on a unified pacifist movement to speculation proposing a varied and complex polygenesis, sixteenth century Anabaptist research remains lively and animated – with regard to both Anabaptist historical beginnings and to contemporary applications of historical interpretation. Then there is, of course, the haunting demon of the Münster Rebellion of 1534-1535 that lingers and will not disappear.

The appeal of Abraham Friesen's book, *Menno Simons: Dutch Reformer between Luther, Erasmus and the Holy Spirit*, is his nimble navigation of the important areas of Menno scholarship. It is impossible, of course, to disconnect Menno Simons from his historic context; hence Part I of the tome ("The Reformation, An Era of Recovery and Conflict: Revolutions, Spiritual and Material") reveals, on a broad and convincing canvas, the reality within which Simons lived, moved and had his being. The more pressing context – and one which cannot be denied or ignored – is covered in much more depth and detail in Part II ("The Movement: Münster as Background and Context"). Friesen devotes almost one hundred pages (about one quarter of the book) to the Münster rebellion, that touchstone event from which Menno Simons articulated and lived forth an alternate faith journey and, in many ways, birthed the Mennonites. In Menno Simons' writings and life, a vision emerged that pointed the way forward for the Mennonite clan and denomination.

The major focus in Friesen's *Menno Simons* is found in Part III ("The Man, Menno Simons: Dutch Reformer between Luther, Erasmus and the Holy Spirit"). It is here that the deeper research is unpacked in meticulous detail: almost 250 pages are committed to both recounting the life of Simons and, equally important, encountering the "problem areas of Menno scholarship." This double entendre of both a retelling of Simons' life and an intermingling of such a rewriting with Menno scholarship makes this new book on Menno Simons a beauty of a read. The finished product makes abundantly clear that Friesen has done his homework well.

There is yet another approach to understanding the journey of Menno Simons that Friesen deftly navigates. It is indisputable that two of the major reformers of the first half of the sixteenth century were Erasmus and Martin Luther, but, when push came to shove (even though Erasmus did support Luther into the early 1520s), Erasmus parted paths with Luther for a variety of significant reasons. Menno Simons, needless to say, could not ignore the towering presences of both Erasmus and Luther; Friesen, with his thoughtful and engaged research, amply illustrates just how Simons found a different pathway than that of either Erasmus or Luther – hence the subtitle of the tome ("Dutch Reformer between Luther and Erasmus").

Simons' journey was not only that of a reformer between Erasmus and Luther; of extreme importance to him was the indwelling and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Friesen's inclusion of the Spirit in Simons' journey is fitting for the simple reason that a sensitive attitude to the inner life was central to Menno Simons.

There are several reasons that *Menno Simons: Dutch Reformer Between Luther, Erasmus, and the Holy Spirit* is a "must read": its deep and thorough feel for the life of Simons; its internal debates on how to interpret Simons; the well-researched history and theorizing on the origins of Anabaptism; the thoughtful articulation on how Simons' route differed from that of Erasmus and Luther (and why); and the important focus on the life-giving reality of the Holy Spirit in Simons' life and writings. Obviously, a valuable counter to Friesen's tome would be how Erasmus and Luther differed from Simons and why, but this would be the labour of another book. There has been a tendency in much Erasmus and Luther scholarship to either ignore Menno Simons and the Anabaptists or to perceive them in a reactionary, reductionist or violent manner (Münster). The valuable contribution of Friesen's *Menno Simons* is the way he, rightly so, suggests that Simons needs to be seen as a mature dialogical partner in the complex nature of first generation Reformation history.

Ron Dart is a university professor, author, and mountaineer. He teaches in the Department of Political Science, Philosophy and Religious Studies at University of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford.

Dorothy M. Peters with Christine S. Kampen. *Daughters in the House of Jacob: A Memoir of Migration*. Winnipeg, MB & Goessel, KS: Kindred Productions, 2016. 275 pp.

Reviewed by Robert Martens

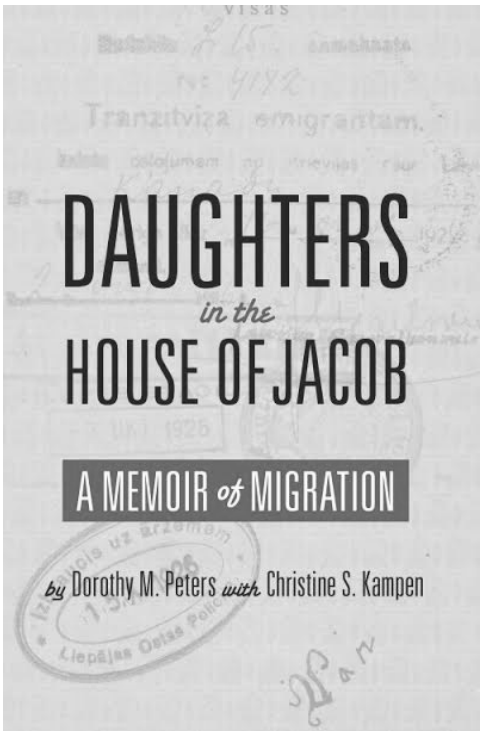
Jacob Franz Doerksen – Agatha Krause Doerksen
|
Jacob Doerksen – Anna Kehler Doerksen
_____|_____
| |
Leonard Doerksen Betty Doerksen Kampen
| |
Dorothy Doerksen Peters Christine Kampen

For cousins Dorothy Peters and Christine Kampen, their grandfather Jacob Doerksen was a family icon, a pastoral model: "[B]oth of us consciously carried our vocational calling as a legacy from him, even though we had never met him personally" (5). Jacob had been ill during the family's flight from the emerging Soviet Union in the 1920s, and out of that fact a family legend was born: "The story is that while emigrating from South Russia to Canada in the 1920s, the family was detained in England because 19-year-old Jacob required surgery. But [his mother] Agatha insisted that the family travel together. They would all go to Canada or they would not go to Canada, but they would stay together. She prevailed upon God, promising to dedicate her firstborn son to the ministry, if only Jacob would be healed and released to travel. It happened just as she had prayed" (2-3).

Authors Peters and Kampen began with plans for an article on how a vocational calling can be transmitted down the generations: Kampen is a minister and Peters, a professor of biblical studies. As they researched their family history, however, they discovered that an article would be inadequate. Three years later, the article had grown into an unusual memoir. The writers decided to start with their own brief biographies, then work their way back one generation at a time, culminating in the story of their great-grandparents. Along the way they encountered some major surprises, not all of them pleasant.

Honesty is a hallmark of this book, including the writers' personal stories. Peters tells of a childhood that was reasonably happy, yet marred by a theology of apocalypse and judgement that sometimes frightened her. As she grew into adulthood, she was confronted with a male-dominated church hierarchy that prohibited women in leadership roles. She writes, "Had I been born a son, I likely would have followed the calling of my father and grandfather. But I was born a daughter" (17). Then tragedy struck when her 15-year-old son was killed in a car crash. The experience shattered some of her lingering beliefs on the omnipotence of God: "In his steadfast Presence, he showed me who he was, is, and will be – not a rigid, dogmatic theological definition written in a textbook" (46).

Unlike those of their Mennonite forebears, the spiritual narratives of Peters and Kampen take place in an era of assimilation and growing individualism. Kampen's parents emerged from the hardships of the Russian Mennonite stream, but her own childhood was relatively free and unencumbered. She had early felt a longing to serve within the church. "You would make a good pastor's wife," her mother Betty remarked, and yet, writes Kampen, "my mother's influence as a deacon and teacher in the church shaped me not for marriage to a pastor, but rather to be a pastor myself" (57). There were obstacles: male church leadership remained reluctant to allow women in authoritative roles, and Kampen's status as a single woman was also a constraint, until she found a congregation that was accepting of a single woman pastor.



The story then moves back in time to Leonard Doerksen, Dorothy's father, born in 1936 in Herbert, Saskatchewan. Leonard's life follows a more traditionalist Mennonite arc. As a young mischievous and creative boy, he was known for imitating his father Jacob's pastoral habits: he was once found standing at the church door in order to "sing and pray and give pennies" (81). Leonard was stunned by the early death of his father Ja-

cob in 1953 but went on to university studies and a career as Bible school teacher and pastor in BC. "I've always felt very ordinary, blue-collar," he said, "and related better to people on the fringe of church and faith" (109). This humility had a deep impact on his daughter Dorothy.

Betty, Leonard's sister and Christine Kampen's mother, also enjoyed a happy childhood but admitted to feeling abandoned when her parents, Jacob and Anna Doerksen, left home on mission trips for extended periods of time. She, too, was traumatized by her father's death. After Jacob's funeral, she was found sitting alone: "*Wie soll ich ohne Papa leben*?" (How can I live without Papa?) she said. Betty also followed in her father's footsteps. She worked in missions programs, served as one of the first female deacons at Eben-Ezer Church in Abbotsford, and sat on the board of Columbia Bible Institute. She was a pastor, say Kampen and Peters, in all but name.

"...my mother's influence as a deacon and teacher in the church shaped me not for marriage to a pastor, but rather to be a pastor myself."

The narrative thread of the book moves back a generation once again, this time to Anna Kehler and Jacob Doerksen, grandparents to the book's authors. Anna grew up in South Russia on a prosperous farm, and that prosperity set the family up as targets during the civil war that followed the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. During a raid on their village, Anna's father was shot in the head. Jacob, born to a poor family in South Russia and a sickly boy who may have suffered heart damage from a bout with rheumatic fever, nearly starved to death in 1919 when the troops of anarchist leader Makhno rampaged through the Ukraine. Anna and Jacob eventually met in Canada and were married in 1933 in Saskatchewan.

Here a surprise confronted Kampen and Peters. Research stirred up a disquieting question: is the story of Agatha's prayer for the sickly 19-year-old Jacob accurate? As described in the book, the answer is not altogether clear.

Jacob seemed naturally predisposed to a life as pastor and teacher. "Jacob lived his faith. He loved people," says one witness (169). In Saskatchewan he preached at Herbert Mennonite Church and taught at the Swift Current Bible School. Clearly, Jacob was a respected Mennonite leader, and yet – here another surprise greeted Peters and Kampen. Jacob Doerksen could be rigid and demanding, controlling to the extent that he even intercepted some of the letters of his Swift Current students. His idealized pastoral image had become somewhat tarnished. After his move to BC, Jacob was rebaptized as a Mennonite Brethren and served as pastor in the Fraser Valley. Then, in 1953, at the age of 44, he suddenly died.

Anna Kehler Doerksen had often been Jacob's foil. She was known, when she felt her husband had crossed some line, to rebuke him with "*Aber Jacob!*" (But Jacob!). After his death, however, she became a rather overzealous parent. Perhaps the trauma of his early death, or the loss of her identity in the community as a pastor's wife, affected her behaviour. The bad as well as the good, say the authors, is passed down through the generations. Leonard eventually told his daughter Dorothy that "his own widowed mother had been fearful and controlling. And he had been like that, too. ... How sorry he was, he said with tears in his eyes, looking at me" (221).

And finally the book reaches back to the authors' great-grandparents, Agatha Krause and Jacob Franz Doerksen. Agatha grew up desperately poor in South Russia, working as a serving girl: "I was not allowed to speak to the Russian girls or to their lady," she recounted, "And I was *so einsam* (so lonely)" (227). Meanwhile Jacob Franz Doerksen had lost his wife and was looking for a woman to care for his family. One day, so the story went, he travelled to the village where Agatha was working and proposed marriage. She considered, prayed about the matter, and accepted. The pair eventually had a happy marriage, despite the hardships of emigration to Canada, poverty, and a large immigration debt to pay off.

But another surprise awaited the writers of this book. Genealogical research indicated that Agatha was pregnant at the time of marriage and gave birth to a daughter, Anna, who died as an infant. The idealized family story was once again turned upside down – but with a sense of blessedness. The choice of Agatha as Jacob Franz's second wife "went against the wishes of his parents, who may have hoped that their son would marry a girl from a higher standing and certainly not one already pregnant! ... The wife that God had given him in the person of Agatha was and would be a character-filled woman. This was becoming a story of generous grace" (237).

What has Ukraine got going for it?

A description of my experiences and impressions while serving as North American Director in Molochansk, Ukraine

Text and photos by Ben Stobbe

Here in Canada we all hear the endless litany of problems in Ukraine. Instability, corruption, unemployment, etc., are accompanied with sighs and headshaking. However, I have had the good fortune of getting into Ukraine annually for many years and always going back to the same villages and cities. This allows me the opportunity to see change, whether good or bad. And for 2016 I see slow but steady improvements. The pictures show a few examples such as clergy coming together at the Mennonite Centre to share their experiences. In times past villages could be identified as being Baptist, or Ukrainian Orthodox, or Mennonite, or Ukrainian Greek Catholic or Pentecostal etc. Now you can see more than one church and even signs of working and celebrating events together.

It's not only the clergy who come together; it is also the babushkas who share a morning together at the Mennonite Centre on a quilting project. They are an example of the increased level of volunteerism in this society. The increasing number of NGOs, Non-Governmental Organizations, which are emerging in towns and cities often are started and staffed by volunteers. Organizations to prevent cruelty to animals, to help people in hospital care, who organize sports and cultural activities are critical in developing an emerging civil society.

One such organization was started by Angelika who started working with children with developmental disabilities. She started the project *Prometei*, a group mostly made up of volunteers who would care primarily for autistic children in a very small apartment. Soon the increasing demand required two apartments, and staff started to get some financial support from parents. Mennonite organizations such as the Mennonite Family Centre and the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine came through with support money. Then a very generous priest who had

been given significant property to be used for community benefit selected *Prometei* as the beneficiary of his generosity. Soon the children were placed in a large comfortable space with kitchen and outdoor space. Then the local school received permission to incorporate older children into their school program. Here is the School principal working together with Angelika the Director of *Prometei.* Now over 60 children are either in the community or school program. Amazing care and progress is being made with these children.

What Ukraine has going for it are clergy who are letting go of turf and seeing the bigger picture, seniors who come together to help, and activists who want to help the vulnerable. This country has a great future. We are privileged to be part of it.

To contribute to the work of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine, you can make your donation to "Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine". All cheques should be mailed to George Dyck, Treasurer, 3675 North Service road, Beamsville, ON, L0R 1B1. If you wish to donate online, go to the website www.canadahelps.org, key in "Mennonite Centre Ukraine" and click on the search button. Then click on "V" for View and "P" for Profile. Then "Donate Now".

We thank you,
Ben and Lil Stobbe, October 31, 2016

Ben Stobbe's blogs from the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine can be accessed at http://benstobbe.blogspot.ca/

Roots and Branches

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Featured Artist—Lois Klassen

By Lois Klassen

Lois (Enns) Klassen has been playing with fabric since the age of 10. She began making quilts in the late 1970s. For several decades, career and family allowed little time for artwork. The birth of grandchildren provided the impetus to return to quilt making and a recent retirement from a teaching career provided uninterrupted time to work.

Although she employs many of the traditional techniques of quilt construction in her work – such as piecing and machine quilting – her pieces show an improvisational approach to design with an emphasis on colour exploration: specifically, the interplay of colour values to create drama and evoke emotion. While paying homage to some of the traditional design devices of quilt making, such as block construction and geometric configurations, most of her quilts are not overtly representational nor traditional but rather impressionistic and expressive.

In the past, her work has been exhibited in the Portland Museum of Art (garment design) and, more recently, in annual joint exhibitions with a local potter. Her quilt *Harvest Moon* (pictured here) was used as cover-art for a recently published book of poetry (*Hush,* by Robert Martens; Ekstasis Editions, 2016). More examples of her work were on display at the juried Art Market in the gallery of the Mennonite Heritage Museum, Abbotsford, BC, in November, 2016.

Lois Klassen lives with her husband, Heinz, in Yarrow, BC. They are members of Highland Community Church. They have two children and seven grandchildren.

Harvest Moon, quilt by Lois Klassen