



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



Postcard given to refugees aboard the *Volendam*. Photo courtesy of Louise Bergen Price

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Editorial

By Robert Martens

Roots and Branches readers will notice a change in format over the next while. During the last several years, we have been mailing four issues annually to subscribers: two issues of 32 pages, and two issues of 16 pages. From this point, we will be mailing three issues of our periodical annually; all three will be the full-length of 32 pages, so the number of pages over the year will remain the same.

The focus in this issue is on German-speaking European Mennonites. John N. Klassen, a teacher and writer featured in a major article, has been involved in shaping and telling this story for many years. Anabaptism, of course, originated in Europe but then dwindled in influence and numbers as Mennonites left for other parts of the globe. In recent decades, tens of thousands of Mennonites (*Aussiedler*) have immigrated to Germany from Russia, once again swelling the numbers of the Anabaptist/Mennonite movement in Europe.

By the time of the Second World War, German Mennonites had nearly completely assimilated into mainstream European life, casting aside traditional principles such as nonresistance. Included in this issue is a review of the book Wilfried Hein has published on his father, Gerhard Hein, who as an army chaplain attempted to maintain the integrity of his faith. Also in this issue is a Christmas message by Christian Neff, a German Mennonite historian struggling with similar concerns in Hitler's totalitarian state.

The European Mennonite story is a complicated one, a mixture of martyrdom and assimilation, traditionalism and individualistic liberalism. It is certainly impossible to point to a "typical" European Mennonite, thus begging the perennial question: what in fact is a Mennonite?

In order to stay in touch with our readers, the Mennonite Historical Society is requesting that our subscribers submit their email addresses to the Society. With an email database of readers, the Society can send out occasional updates, reports, and event announcements via the Internet. Please consider going to the MHSBC website and sending your email address via the contact link.

Letter to the editors

We welcome all letters to the editor. Please mail correspondence to 1818 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford, BC V2T 5X4; or email to archives@mhsbc.com. Letters may be edited for length or content.

Re: MHSBC fundraising event, November 13, 2016

Thank you for your excellent characterization of Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 speech, impugning Stalin.

Certainly the speech itself must have been a tour de force, as you alluded. The English translation thereof runs to 85 pages and close to 24,000 words. Masochistic I think is a closer assessment.

What is much more intriguing is the man himself. What exactly was he attempting to accomplish on that day, when he himself was so complicit in Stalinesque brutality? – at least to the moment of Stalin's death. Perhaps he was trying to pin all the blame in whose orbit he nimbly danced. If this speech represented a path to power, it succeeded. If K. was setting out to polish his own historical legacy, not so much. For the momentary thaw he may have initiated soon spooked him, fearing all would be lost. The 1960s was a shivering time for many Russian citizens, and certainly for Mennonites, and the more so for Mennonites and others of faith.

On one level, perhaps not unlike Trump, K. sometimes came across as a simple apparatchik. But underneath the beguiling persona, he seemed to have been a power savvy, calculating politician.

You have whetted my appetite for the man and the era he represented. I really should read one of those excellent studies of Khrushchev. Of course, the exigencies of the Cold War ramped up the amps and a lot of public posturing, on both sides of the great divide.

David Giesbrecht
Abbotsford, BC

Re: Roots and Branches Nov 2015 & Nov 2016

Thank you for the publication *Roots and Branches* as you have published articles pertaining to my ancestry.

The November 2015 publication contained an article about the first Mennonite migration to South Russia. This migration included Jacob and Sara Hoeppner who were my great-great-great-maternal grandparents.

The last publication of November 2016 included an article about the Friesen-Braun trials. Much of the article mentions the town of Renata. This was the town where my paternal grandparents along with their family, which included my Father, settled in 1909. My Father probably would have known the two men as he owned a saw mill at that time also. The photo of the Renata ferry dock brought memories to me as I remember many a time of going down to meet the ferry.

Matilda Williams

Genealogy Workshop 2016

Reported by Cheryl Isaac

Thirty-five people attended another informative Mennonite Genealogy Workshop on Saturday, November 19, 2016. Workshop presenters were Dr. Tim Janzen, Dr. Glenn Penner and Richard Thiesen. Glenn led two sessions in the morning. In the first session he reviewed what has been learned from Y-DNA in the last decade.* During the other, he addressed the spelling of Mennonite surnames and the importance of original signatures on documents to validate the correct spelling.

Tim gave an excellent overview of Mennonite genealogical research, listing certain books and Internet sites very useful in that field. Richard ended the day with an example of how early Russian census lists assisted him with researching one of his ancestors. Time was allotted for questions and answers. Always something new to learn.

Dr. Glenn Penner and Dr. Tim Janzen are looking for males with the following surnames who would be willing to complete a Y-DNA test so that the number of unique Mennonite ancestors with a particular surname can be established. If your surname is listed or if you know of anyone with any of these last names who would be interested and willing to take a DNA test, please contact Tim Janzen (tjanzen@comcast.net) or Glenn Penner (gpenner@uoguelph.ca).

Surnames: Albrecht, Allert, Arends, Bartsch, Beier, Bench, Brucks, Daniels, Dau, Deckert, Delesky/Solesky, Dickmann/Dueckmann, Eck, Echert, Elias, Fehderau, Goetz, Goetke, Guhr, Heier, Horn, Jaeger, Kampen/von Kampen, Langman, Lehrman, Lemke, Meckelburger, Momber, Neudorf, Neustaedter, Philipsen, Richert, Rohde, Rose, Schoenke, Schwartz, Siebert, Siebrand, Sommerfeld, Sperling, Sprunk, Steffen, Striemer, Suckau, Tetzlaff, Thimm, Thun, Wedler, Weiss, Weier, Werner, Westewick, Wichert, Worms, Zimmermann.

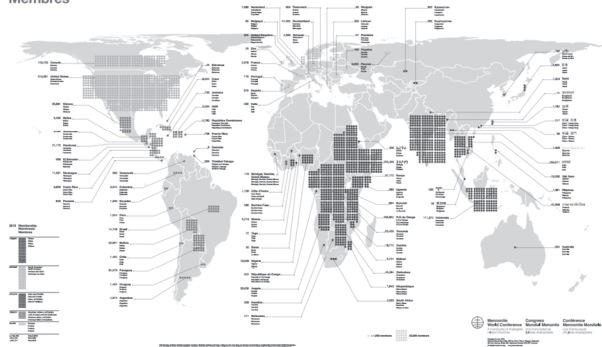
*A Y chromosome DNA test (Y-DNA test) is a genealogical DNA test which is used to explore a man's patrilineal or direct father's-line ancestry. The Y chromosome, like the patrilineal surname, passes down virtually unchanged from father to son. *Wikipedia*

Upcoming Events

The Global Anabaptist Movement

Membership
Membresia
Membres

2015



Dr. John Roth

**Friday, March 17, 2017
7:00 p.m.**

**Clearbrook Mennonite Brethren Church
2719 Clearbrook Rd, Abbotsford, BC V2T 2Y9**



Presenter:

Dr. John Roth, Professor of History at Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana, Director of the Mennonite Historical Library at Goshen, Editor of the Mennonite Quarterly Review, and Director of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism.

The Mennonite Historical Society of BC



and its Meaning in the 21st Century

Annual General Meeting of MHSBC

Friday, April 7, at 1:30. Ricky's Restaurant, 32080 Marshall Rd.

"A Small Sign of Life and Love: Letters out of the Soviet Union during the Khrushchev Thaw"

a Vancouver performance of MHSBC's annual fundraiser with Louise Bergen Price, Ruth Derksen Siemens, Richard Thiessen and Robert Martens. Special music by Ian Funk.

April 23rd, 2017 at 2:30pm

Sherbrooke Mennonite Church, 7155 Sherbrooke St, Vancouver, BC. Program will be followed by faspa (late afternoon lunch) and dessert.

If you missed the November event, now's your chance! There will also be an opportunity to give financially to MHSBC.

Tickets are \$10.00

To purchase with PayPal, see our website: www.mhsbc.com

To pay by email, send a message to: archives@mhsbc.com

To pay by phone, call the MHSBC Office at [604-853-6177](tel:604-853-6177)

Katie Funk Wiebe (1924-2016): the loss of a Mennonite icon

This brief life story, here slightly edited, was published in *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, Jan/Feb 2017 and is reprinted here with permission. *MB Herald* editor Karla Braun writes, “True to form, Katie prepared the text herself alongside her daughter who circulated it freely for publication after her death. The version you saw in MBH was edited for length from Katie’s original version.”

Katie Funk Wiebe died Oct. 23, 2016 in Wichita, Kansas at the age of 92, leaving a legacy of faith, storytelling and an invitation to live by choice, not by default.

In addition to being an author, biographer, editor, columnist and essayist, Katie was a speaker, preacher, prophet, provocateur, feminist, teacher, mentor and historian. In 2000, *The Mennonite* named her among the top 20 Mennonites with “the most powerful influence on life and belief of the ... Mennonite Church in the 20th century.”

Katie was born Sep. 15, 1924 in Laird, Saskatchewan to Mennonite immigrants from Ukraine and grew up in Blaine Lake, Saskatchewan. A reading of a devotional book “called forth faith on my part to believe that God wanted something of me,” Katie wrote. In 1945 she was

baptized and entered MB Bible College in Winnipeg, where she met Walter Wiebe; they married Aug. 21, 1947, and were called to Christian journalism.

Although religious journalism was dominated by men, Katie began to publish articles in *The Canadian Mennonite* and *Christian Living*. In 1962 she began writing “Women in the Church” for USMB’s *Christian Leader*. The column became “Viewpoint” when Katie persuaded her editors that she had something to say to both women and men.

Weeks after moving the family to Hillsboro, Kansas, and having been ill for five years with a progressive disease, Walter died on Nov. 17, 1962. Early widowhood pushed Katie into the workforce. While a copy editor and proofreader at the Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, she continued to write freelance articles. In 1966 she became an English instructor at Tabor College, where she earned a BA in 1968. She earned an MA in 1972 from Wichita State University, and Tabor promoted her to associate professor in 1981.

Katie wrote stories of “women who were often overlooked because they were not part of the official historical accounts.” By 1970 she was actively calling for an MB study conference on “the position of women in the church.” Her first widely-read book, *Alone: A Search for Joy*, was published in 1976. Katie became involved in many levels of denominational leadership on the boards of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, the journal *Direction*, and the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren, on Mennonite Central Committee task forces, the publicity committee for the Mennonite World Conference assembly in Wichita, and as editor of *Christian Leader* and *Rejoice!*

In 1990 she retired from Tabor and moved to Wichita in 1991, eager to serve the wider constituency of the church she loved and to bring meaning to her life through writing and speaking of her own experience of aging; and of the role of older adults and women in the church. In 2011 she began a blog. Katie wrote more than 2,000 articles, columns and book reviews, and wrote or edited more than two dozen books.

Katie Funk Wiebe was questing, curious, persevering, loyal, invitational, loving, brave, true, a great storyteller and teacher, and always learning and growing.



Source: MB Herald

The Daily Bonnet

By Andrew J. Bergman

Recently I read the GAMEO (Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online) entry on “Humour” written by Katie Funk Wiebe in the late 1980s. Although it cites the writing of Arnold Dyck and others as examples of Mennonite humour, these Mennonite comedy pioneers are viewed as anomalies or exceptions to the rule – the rule being that Mennonite culture, in general, was fairly averse to humour of any type. The article paints a pretty bleak picture for Mennonite humourists. Wiebe notes that “levity” of any sort was historically frowned upon in Mennonite communities, and satire, although attempted, “has not been used successfully in Mennonite periodicals.” I suppose this is why the reaction to and popularity of *The Daily Bonnet* still surprises me a little. It seems a lot has changed in the last few decades. I think this is due, in part, to modernization and social change, but also to boundary-pushing Mennonite writers like Armin Wiebe and Miriam Toews.

I come from the same town as Miriam Toews and although she still has some detractors, I think many Steinbachers, at least of my generation, have come to appreciate her work. I once joked in *The Daily Bonnet* that a massive Miriam Toews statue was being planned for downtown Steinbach. It’s not really true, of course, though I’d be all in favour of it if it were. I think that her writing has played a significant role in shaping the discourse in Steinbach and other conservative Mennonite communities. Perhaps we’re slowly learning not to take ourselves too seriously and that self-examination is of value.

Given this new humour-accepting Mennonite environment, I guess it was inevitable that a Mennonite satire news site would arise. Many readers of *The Daily Bonnet* have told me that they just “stumbled upon it,” so to speak, while browsing social media. Similarly, I suppose you could say that I stumbled into writing it. I’ve written for a variety of publications in the past, sometimes on Mennonite issues, but I had only occasionally written satire. Back in April, I wrote a satirical news article about the Steinbach city council on my personal blog. To my surprise a lot of people read it. A few weeks after that I decided to create an entire website dedicated to Mennonite satire, and that’s how *The Daily Bonnet* was born.

Mennonite Church Signs
Pastor to Massive 30-Year
\$1.2 Million Contract

All Abe Friesens Required By
Law to Use Middle Initial

Mennonite Man Successfully
Traces His Ancestors Back to
Adam

Satire headlines from www.dailybonnet.com

Writing *The Daily Bonnet* has not only changed my perception of my community and culture, but also our past. I’ve had some interest in Mennonite history for a while, but other than one class in college, I didn’t study it in any great detail before. Since writing *The Daily Bonnet*, I’ve had to. I purchased a Plautdietsch dictionary and have tried to get caught up on the Russian Mennonite experience by reading some of the classic works on the topic. I was fortunate enough to discover a treasure trove of Mennonite history books (E. K. Francis, Frank Epp, etc.) at a used book sale in Steinbach. I’m pleased to report that not only were they informative reads, but they were also a great bargain.

I’m optimistic that when future Mennonite historians revise the GAMEO entry on humour, they’ll be able to put a little more positive spin on the topic. Yes, as Mennonites, we can laugh at ourselves. We can be self-critical. Yes, it’s true, even those of us Mennonites stuck on the frozen Canadian prairies, who sometimes stew with envy at our BC cousins, can learn to smile ... just not in winter.

Andrew J. Bergman is a University of Manitoba graduate and founder of *The Daily Bonnet*. His work has also appeared in *Rhubarb*, *Geez*, CBC.ca and others. He lives and writes in Steinbach, Manitoba.

Names from the soul: Kansas Mennonite traditions 1875-1945

By Bruce Hiebert, PhD

Between 1875 and 1885 approximately 10,000 Mennonites left the plains and lowlands of Russia for the great plains of the American West. Driving them from Russia were reaction against government pressure to assimilate and the need for more land to serve a growing population. They came to the USA with assurances they would be able to maintain the religious freedom they desired. However, what they found once they arrived were new pressures as American settlement practices denied them the ability to build traditional isolated Mennonite villages and they were scattered among existing settlers in Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, the Dakotas and Minnesota. While forming large groups in these regions, they lived next door to other settlers from the American East as well as immigrants from across Western Europe. The result was pressure to assimilate that escalated particularly in the context of World Wars I and II. This pressure can be seen in the way Mennonites in the new country named their children.

In Russia, using a combination of individual enterprise and a collective-village system held together by a universal and enforced religion, these Mennonites had been a wealthy and independent group. Following the freeing of the serfs in the 1860s, these Mennonites expanded across the Russian landscape as successful farmers and entrepreneurs, combining deeply conservative social and religious practices with agrarian and economic innovation (Urry 2007). In the 1870s they faced pressure from the Russian government to assimilate into the greater Russian people (Loewen 1989). In response an estimated one-third of the Mennonites then in Russia migrated to the Great Plains of the United States and Canada (Dyck 1967). But the pressures to assimilate did not end upon arrival in North America. In some respects the land laws of the USA, and to a lesser degree Canada, forced assimilation in quite unexpected ways and much more rapidly than in Russia (Juhnke 1969; 1989).

In Russia Mennonites lived primarily in culturally isolated villages on collectively owned blocks of land. These communities were a fertile ground for the maintenance

of distinct characteristics. Despite what might be daily interactions with other Russian peasants, Mennonites returned to secure religious and cultural enclaves at night. In the USA the homesteading pattern of 160 acres (1/4 section) per family broke Mennonite villages up into spread-out collections of individual farmsteads. So while Mennonites might purchase or homestead a group of sections, they found neighbours of very different social and religious patterns in close proximity. Nor was a nightly return to a personal cluster of homesteads anything like the cultural and religious security of return to a village. Russian Mennonites in America also encountered westward migrating American Mennonites with significantly different traditions. The result was a rapid breakdown in the traditional sources of Russian Mennonite identity, including names given to children.

Assimilation can be measured through the patterns of life courses constructed from genealogical records (Meyer 1988). Patterns of birth, marriage, migration, and death are among the most important details these records reveal as individual families and whole peoples record the facts of their lives. Mennonites are among the most genealogically well-documented peoples on the basis of careful church records running back centuries amplified by the current work of the California Mennonite Historical Society (CMHS) to aggregate and then expand these records using family records, census documents, government records, travel documents, and location visits. Currently the GRANDMA (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry) database constructed by the CMHS contains more than 1.2 million life courses for the lives of those of the Russian Mennonite tradition, their ancestors and descendants. As the life courses constructed from those records approach the norms of the surrounding culture, assimilation is revealed.

Names are one of the primary characteristics of cultural identity (Berger et al. 2012). Names given at birth shift as parents seek to shape the identities of their children to fit or resist cultural experiences (Liberson & Bell 1992; Ngubane & Thabethe 2013; Gulpinar 2012; Jayaraman 2004). One of the measures of assimilation to American culture can be found in the naming practices Mennonites applied to their children. As revealed by genealogical records, a tradition with only a few first names broke down rapidly in the context of non-Mennonite neighbours as they began to give their children names new to the tradition.

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However, while these new names show clear influence from the surrounding American culture, the overall effect is the breakdown of naming traditions rather than an assimilation to the dominant culture. As well, within this set of changing names the emergence of a new first name, Menno, from Menno Simons, the man whose name was given to the religious movement, suggests that at least for a time some Mennonites felt they needed to actively resist American culture. But use of this name was relatively short-lived, and by 1945 indications of a deliberate Mennonite naming tradition had ended and no new naming patterns appeared. The changing names appeared to indicate the disintegration of a tradition rather than assimilation. The strongest conclusion is that, once in America, Mennonites transformed themselves from an isolated people with strong traditions to a people at once integrated with and yet still distinct from the American mainstream.

The study

This study proceeds by taking individual first names from the GRANDMA database in samples, three from Russia (1835, 1865, 1875) and eight from the USA (1875, 1885, 1895, 1905, 1915, 1925, 1935, 1945) to determine patterns of naming. By examining the number of times names appear (Table 1) at each sample point, the fundamental patterns of naming and their transitions over time become evident. Then, examining the ten most common names in each period (Table 2) and comparing them to US naming trends reveals the extent to which dominant cultural names enter the Mennonite naming matrix. Finally, the name Menno (Table 3) has a peculiar pattern suggesting that the cultural forces were not merely toward assimilation but also included efforts to construct a resistant identity.

Names were selected from the GRANDMA database by running a search on all persons born in a specific sample year and in appropriate locations. For the Russian samples, this meant Russian place names. For the American samples, this meant Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, the Dakotas, and Wisconsin, the major centres of settlement for the Russian Mennonites. Names were aggregat-



Source: GAMEO

ed under the standard variant identified in its English form (John includes Ivan, Johann, Jonnie, etc.).

The Menno study identified all uses of the name Menno anywhere in the USA during the period 1889 through 1948 as found within the GRANDMA database. The year 1889 marks its first appearance among Mennonites of Russian origin and 1948 marks the end of its sixth decade of use, allowing easy comparison to other samples.

Results

In 1835 in Russia, Mennonites used a total of forty distinct first names. While the number of children needing names had tripled by 1875, the total number of names in use had only increased by 30%. However, giving the children new names was not the goal of this increase. Ten names accounted for about two-thirds of the first names regardless of the period. While the Russian Mennonites went through a profound social transition during the period, that change appears to have had no significant impact on naming practices.

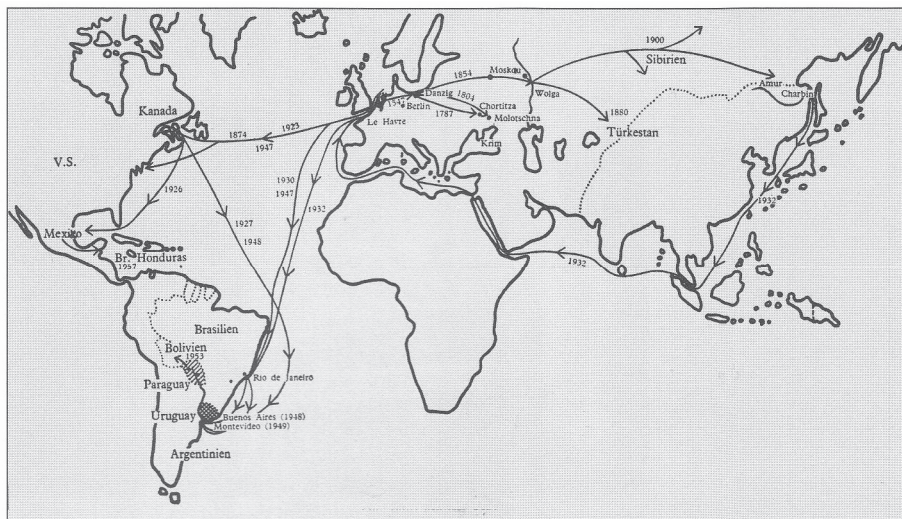
The same situation does not apply to the United States. In the United States, Mennonites began with the same naming pattern as in Russia, but it changed significantly over time. The number of distinct names climbed very rapidly, quadrupling in forty years, and then climbed slightly more to peak at 240 distinct names used

among 1047 children in 1925. Just as significantly, the proportion of children who received the ten most popular names dropped from 66% in 1875 to only 20% in 1915, and then dropped slightly more to 14% in 1925.

Comparing forty years of Russian naming with the first forty years of American naming reveals the Mennonites in the USA lost their traditions. Naming traditions which were firm for decades in Russia completely disintegrated in the USA, showing an almost straight line of increasing diversification from 1875 to 1915.

This disintegration is also visible in a review of the top ten names. While the number of children receiving the top ten names substantially declined, the names themselves remained virtually unchanged until 1915. In that year three new and relatively unusual names made the top ten: Hilda, Edna, and Esther. In 1925 half of the top ten names were new. By 1945 only two traditional names, Mary and John, managed to stay in the top ten list. Peter, number one in 1835, dropped off the list in 1915. Jacob, number two in 1835, was gone by 1925. On the other hand, the number one name in both 1935 and 1945 was Jane, a name which only first showed up as a child's name among these Mennonites in 1915. Lawrence, the top boy's name in 1945, was first used in 1885, and then not again till early in the twentieth century.

However, it is not a case of Mennonites assimilating to American naming patterns. While the new names were clearly coming from the surrounding population, Mennonites do not appear to be taking the favourite names of their American fellows as identified in Social Security lists (Campbell n.d.). For example, the name, William, a somewhat popular name among traditional Mennonites, never made the Mennonite top ten even though it was always in the American top ten from the onset of American records through the late 1970s. Jane, the most popular Mennonite name in the 1930s and 1940s, was never in the American top ten. Robert, the most popular American boys' name during the 1920s and 1930s, only made it into the Mennonite top ten in 1925. On the other hand both Dorothy and Donald seemed to infiltrate Mennonite naming straight out of the American mainstream. Both names had sharp spikes in American popularity and moved onto the Mennonite top ten lists at exactly the same time, but fell off the Mennonite lists as they



Russian migrations, 1870s-1940s. Horst Gerlach, *Die Russlandmennoniten*, p. 11

dropped out of American popularity. Thus the absorption of American names appears to be completely erratic with no consistent adoption of any American naming conventions.

There also appears to have been some resistance to American naming, though it was brief. The name, Menno, from Menno Simons, the group's founder, became a significant name among these Mennonites just as they began to part from their naming traditions. Even more so, this name surged in popularity in 1917 as the United States was entering World War I (15 uses). The war was extremely popular in the United States and Mennonites were frightened and revolted by this popularity (Homan 1994). The use of the name Menno appears to have been a deliberate statement by some parents through their children to recall the peaceful origins and pacifist commitments of their spiritual origin.

Conclusion

Mennonite naming traditions are a window into the soul of the people. As a people with a long history of deeply conservative and culturally dissident practices, they could have been expected to strongly maintain naming traditions even in the face of a dominant culture. However, it appears to be the case that this only happens in the context of strong face-communities, something Mennonites experienced in Russia but not in the USA. When those strong face-communities were not present, it was not a case of assimilation but of fragmentation. Mennonites did not conform to American naming conventions, at least not within the time frame of this study, but they did experience the fragmentation of their own naming traditions. It was a situation of strong traditions rapidly breaking down, not of new traditions being adopted.

Table 1. Name frequency by years

Location	Russia					USA						
Sample Year	1835	1865	1875		1875	1885	1895	1905	1915	1925	1935	1945
Total number of children	346	906	899		160	647	832	882	1014	1047	674	808
Number of distinct names	40	55	54		33	86	121	172	221	240	224	230
Ratio of children per name	8.7	16.5	16.6		4.8	7.5	6.9	5.1	4.6	4.4	3.0	3.5
Percent to top 10 names	64%	65%	66%		66%	58%	47%	33%	20%	14%	12%	14%
Number of unique names (only one use in study)	0	2	1		0	6	6	15	20	27	24	31
Percent to unique names	0	0.2%	0.1%		0.0%	0.9%	0.7%	1.7%	2.0%	2.6%	3.6%	3.8%

Table 2. Rank order of top 10 names by year

	Russia					USA						
Rank	1835	1865	1875	1875	1875	1885	1895	1905	1915	1925	1935	1945
1	Peter	Mary	Katherine	Jacob	Jacob	John	Anne	Mary	Mary	Elizabeth	Jane	Jane
2	Jacob	Anne	Jacob	John	John	Katherine	John	Anne	Elizabeth	Dorothy	Dorothy	Lawrence
3	Anne	John	John	Anne	Anne	Mary	Mary	Henry	Henry	Laura	Mary	Mary
4	Mary	Katherine	Mary	Katherine	Katherine	Anne	Henry	John	Anne	Mary	Donald	Carol
5	Katherine	Peter	Helen	Helen	Helen	Henry	Katherine	Jacob	John	John	Elizabeth	John
6	Henry	Jacob	Anne	Peter	Peter	Peter	Jacob	Katherine	Helen	Robert	John	Jacob
7	John	Henry	Henry	Henry	Henry	Jacob	Helen	Elizabeth	Hilda	Esther	Jacob	Robert
8	Helen	Helen	Peter	Mary	Mary	Helen	Elizabeth	Helen	Edna	Helen	Richard	Gerald
9	Agnes	Abraham	Abraham	Abraham	Abraham	Abraham	Peter	David	Esther	Wilma	Shirley	Judy
10	Elisabeth	Agnes	Agnes	Elizabeth	Elizabeth	Elizabeth	Susan	Peter	Jacob	Alice	Leroy	Katherine

Table 3. Occurrence of the name Menno during the decade

1889-1898	1899-1908	1909-1918	1919-1928	1929-1938	1939-1948
20	49	61	39	17	7

This suggests that Mennonites remained a people apart but one with a new freedom to experiment in the American cultural landscape. In doing so, they may have been assimilating to a general frontier spirit (Varnum & Kitayama 2011), though such a conclusion would require further study.

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The use of the name Menno appears to have been a deliberate statement by some parents through their children to recall the peaceful origins and pacifist commitments of their spiritual origin.

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A Modest Hero: the Daring Adventures of Herbert Bergen

Excerpts taken from *Up from the Rubble* by Peter and Elfrieda Dyck. Waterloo: Herald Press, 1991.

Introduced by Louise Bergen Price

Stories of individual heroism are often overshadowed by larger events. How many of us, after reading of the dramatic rescue of 1,115 Mennonites from Berlin recall the name Herbert Bergen? Yet without his work, many of those refugees would not have come to safety. The following excerpts from Peter and Elfrieda Dyck's book, *Up from the Rubble*, tell an inspiring story of heroism and faith. The story begins in June, 1946, when Peter and Elfrieda were sent to Berlin to help a small number of Mennonites stranded in Berlin. That small number soon mushroomed as more and more refugees from the Russian zone joined them. Among these refugees was Herbert Bergen.



Peter and Elfrieda Dyck. Source: www.goshen.edu

Herbert was in his early twenties and had only one eye; the other he covered with a black patch. It made him rather conspicuous, and for that reason he felt uneasy. Before Herbert came to us, he had only two goals in life: to get enough food to survive, and to find the missing members of his family. With all the misfortune of having lost home, friends, and everything else, Herbert still considered himself blessed because he was in the American zone of Germany. He frequently moved from one place to another, working when he could find work, and always looking for lost relatives and friends.

Herbert finally found his aunt in the Russian zone, but after several unsuccessful attempts to flee to the American zone, they gave up and came to the MCC camp in Berlin.

There Herbert found his real mission: going into the Russian zone and leading other refugees to Berlin the way he had brought his aunt. Each trip was filled with suspense. Sometimes he returned promptly, and sometimes he was gone for many days. He was always in personal danger. Sometimes he brought two or three persons with him, and sometimes more.

On one occasion he brought sixteen. ... It had been particularly strenuous, not only because the group was so big, but also because there were old women and small children among them. The women couldn't move fast, and the children wouldn't keep quiet when absolute silence was a must. He got farmers to haul refugees by wagon at night to a railway station. In the morning he would 'negotiate,' as he called it, with the ticket agent to sell him tickets to the closed city. ... Then he discovered that Soviet agents were at that very moment systematically combing the train for suspect passengers. He moved all those old ladies and children off again undetected, walked them to another town, and placed them onto a different train. At every stop, he wondered if the police would board that train, too. It all turned out to be too much for him. When he delivered the sixteen safely to the camp, he collapsed.

One day I asked Herbert, "How many persons have you brought to Berlin so far?"

He shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know. I don't think it would be right to keep a record of good deeds." (p. 145-146)

Herbert was not part of the dramatic rescue Peter and Elfrieda describe in the book. When permission for the Berlin group to leave was denied, Herbert and two friends decided to reach the SS Volendam on their own. They left at night, in the bitter cold, together with the Wieler family. The Wielers soon turned back, convinced they would freeze to death before they would reach the

border. But the young men kept going until they reached a forest near the border. From here they could see the high watchtowers, coiled wire barriers, landmines, and men with binoculars making sure no one would cross.

Since they couldn't go over, they decided to go through a coal mine. But that entrance, too, was guarded. They gave the sentry some bread and tried to talk him into letting them pass, but he had his orders.

Later, on board the SS Volendam, Herbert told the story of their daring escape to Peter and Elfrieda.

"We talked to him for quite a while, told him we were refugees, from Russia, going to Paraguay, boarding a ship at Bremerhaven, and all that. And suddenly we broke off and dashed for the entrance of the mine."

"What if he would have shot?" we gasped. "Didn't you think of that?"

"Yes, we did," Herbert responded. "But by that time several things had become clear: One, he wouldn't let us

through. Two, the ship wouldn't wait. Three, he had heard enough, and with the bread on his lap, we didn't think he'd shoot. So we made a mad dash for it."

"Wow!" Elfrieda and I responded, "what an escape!"

"Now we have one more question, Herbert. How did you know that there was a coal mine at the border with openings to both sides, the Russian and the British? How did you know that you could go down the shaft on one side, creep along the underground tunnels, find a shaft to follow up, and presto, you're out on the other side?"

Herbert smiled his usual kind smile, adjusted his black eye patch and shrugged his shoulders. He gave the same stock answer he had always given us in Berlin when we had asked how he managed to find the Mennonite refugees in the Russian zone and lead them safely to the MCC camp.

He simply said, "Dass hat man sich befragt" (one had inquired). He was so modest that he didn't even talk in the first person. Simply, "One had inquired." (p. 212)

Memorial to the Victims of Communism

By Ruth Derksen Siemens

As part of the international movement to commemorate victims of Communism, community leaders, government officials and foreign diplomats in Canada have promoted a memorial that would recognize these victims and the contributions Canada has made as a place of refuge.

Over the next two years, a monument to the victims of Communism will be built in Ottawa at the Garden of the Provinces and Territories. Almost 30% of today's Canadians have a link to Communism. They are in Canada because their forbears or they themselves have fled repressive regimes. However, too few present-day Canadians are aware of the effects of Communism.

Five jury members have been chosen from across Canada to determine the final design. One of the members of the jury is Dr. Ruth Derksen, Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia and a first-generation Canadian of Russian Mennonite descent. This appointment is the result of her research and publications on a corpus of letters written from the former Soviet Union by Russian Mennonites. Some of these letters appear in her edited work, *Remember Us: Letters from*

Stalin's Gulag (1930-37), and in the documentary film, *Through the Red Gate*.

The project is administered by the "Tribute to Liberty" whose objective is to raise funds and administer the completion of a monument in Ottawa. As part of the fundraising initiatives (see www.tributetoliberty.com) several opportunities are being offered to the general public and to donors:

- An online public consultation process (offered by Canadian Heritage) will be available after the jury deliberations on March 3. Members of the public will be able to register the design of their choice, making possible a diverse representation from various ethno-cultural groups.
- A donation of \$200 purchases a brick for the virtual Pathway to Liberty that leads to the Memorial. Each brick can be donated with a story, a message or a dedication to a victim of Communism.
- A donation of \$1000 purchases the placement of a name of a victim of Communism on the site together with the victim's story.

Tribute to Liberty has received the support of the Government of Canada and Heritage Minister Mélanie Joly in consultation with Canada's cultural communities. This project will ensure that the monument will endure as a symbol for all those who fled their homelands and who found refuge in Canada.

The *Volendam*

By Louise Bergen Price

This is the first in a series on transportation of Mennonite migrants.

To Russian Mennonite refugees after World War II, still looking over their shoulders in case Soviet officials were to try “repatriating” them, all the concerns and worries of a life in the New World must have been swept aside, at least for the moment, when they watched Europe recede into the distance. The names of the ships that carried them to safety became an important legacy. None more so than the *Volendam*, which was involved in the first major transport of displaced persons after the war.

Built in 1922 by the Glasgow firm of Harland & Wolff, the *Volendam* was purchased by the Holland America firm as a passenger liner. At 575’ (175m) in length she was a good-sized ship, although smaller than the famous *Titanic* (883’) and only half the size of a large cruise ship today. She was outfitted to accommodate about 2000 passengers in first, second and third class. The *Volendam’s* regular route lay between Rotterdam and New York. She was on this route in April 1940, and thus managed to escape falling into the hands of German forces then invading the Netherlands. Like numerous other merchant marine vessels, she became part of the Allied fleet.

In May 1940, the British government developed a scheme to evacuate British school children, a program run by the Children’s Overseas Reception Board. It was through this program that, in August 1940, the *Volendam* set sail for Canada as part of a convoy of ships. She was carrying 879 passengers, among them 320 children and their caregivers. Only one day into the voyage, she was torpedoed by a German submarine. It was night, pitch black, and the seas were rough when the captain ordered everyone to abandon ship. “It may appear extraordinary, but it is a fact that it took us no more than 3½ minutes to get all those children out of bed and up to their boat stations,” their supervisor, Mr. C.H. Hindley,



Passengers boarding *Volendam*, 1947. Source: Wikipedia

stated (“Gourock Times”). One of the seamen remarked that the children had treated the event as an adventure and remained calm, singing “Roll out the Barrel” over and over while waiting to be rescued from the life rafts. The only casualty that night was a purser who fell overboard and drowned. The casualties could have been much higher – during repairs in Scotland, another torpedo was found embedded in the ship’s hull. If it had exploded, the ship would likely have gone down. After repairs, the *Volendam* was used as a troop carrier for the duration of the war.

The ship’s Mennonite connection began in early 1947. Over a thousand Mennonites were trapped in Berlin, in danger of repatriation back to the USSR and probable imprisonment or exile. The situation was urgent. MCC needed to find a way to get them to West Berlin and from there to a country that would offer the refugees a new home. Canada was still not accepting large numbers of refugees, but Paraguay agreed to take up to 3,000. Ships were in high demand, though, since half had been destroyed during the war. At this point, Queen Wilhelmina intervened, stating that since Mennonites had helped during the famine in the Netherlands, “should not

the one hand wash the other?” and the *SS Volendam* became available (Dyck 165). C. F. Klassen chartered the ship for \$375,000. Since the ship’s capacity was over 2,000, the decision was made to fill the ship with other Mennonite refugees waiting in camps who were willing to relocate to Paraguay.

Paperwork was done and everything seemed in order, including permission for the Berlin refugees to travel through the Soviet zone by train. On January 27, 339 Mennonite refugees boarded the *Volendam* in Rotterdam. The ship then sailed to Bremerhaven where they were to be joined by the Berlin group, as well as 1,070 Mennonite refugees who had been processed in Munich. Then, at the last minute, a phone call. The Berlin group would not be allowed to proceed. The “Operation Mennonite” that followed reads like a cloak and dagger story, with high level telegrams, secret messages, missed connections, meetings with top U.S. military officials, Soviet guards in pursuit, and a train filled with Mennonite refugees waiting breathlessly at the border for the light to turn from red to green. As the Soviet guards came closer, the light changed – something Peter Dyck would always call a miracle. Then a dash to the harbour where the *Volendam* waited. The train arrived in Bremerhaven on January 31. The following day, the *Volendam* set sail with 2,306 Mennonite refugees on board.

Peter Dyck describes the ship: “Cabins were large, some of them with fifty to a hundred bunks and hammocks. The men and older boys were together, and the women with girls and smaller children were also together in their quarters. The dining rooms were spacious, and the food was excellent and plentiful. As one might have expected on a Dutch ship, everything was spotlessly clean and the refugees were expected to keep it so” (208). After all the initial excitement, the voyage was mostly uneventful and the ship arrived in Buenos Aires three weeks later. Thankful immigrants would name their new colony Volendam.

In the meantime, the doors to Canada had finally opened, and by mid-1948, immigration

was in full swing. In June there were twelve ships in European ports ready to carry Mennonite refugees to Canada. Among them was the *Volendam* which left Rotterdam June 10 with 278 Mennonites from the Diepholz refugee camp. The refugees were accompanied by Siegfried Janzen, a Canadian MCC worker. In Southampton, the ship stopped to pick up 1,000 British immigrants before setting off for Quebec.

Ältester Heinrich Winter, one of the few Mennonite ministers to survive the Gulag, was one of the refugees on the ship, travelling with his wife, son and daughter. His son Henry, later also a minister, describes how the refugees wrote a letter of thanks to those who worked for the MCC, as well as those who had offered so much to make the emigration possible: “We owe you much love. May the Lord also further bless your work with the fullness of his grace...” (Winter 159). In turn, the refugees each received a colour postcard of the *Volendam*. The message of encouragement on the back concluded with the words, “The Mennonite Central Committee rejoices with you, wishes you a good voyage, a wonderful home and God’s leading; and hopes that this marks the end of the refugee experience for you.”

On June 21, the ship docked at the Louise Embankment station in Quebec City. The refugees were allowed to stay on board for another night before being processed at the Immigration Centre where they received a final stamp on their travel pass. Each arrival received \$15 to



Mennonites boarding in Bremerhaven. Source: MAID



Government Immigration Hall, Quebec City. Source: Pier21

buy food for the train voyage.

To the great surprise of the new arrivals, another group was waiting to board the ship – 639 Bergthaler and 644 Sommerfelder *Kanadier* Mennonites who felt that their faith and way of life were being threatened. Winter writes, “We, who had disembarked from the *Volendam* in Quebec, hoped that Canada would become our new home where we could live our faith in freedom.” Now, before their eyes, a group was leaving Canada for the same reason. In spite of this, the newcomers “faced the future with confidence” (160-1).

On June 25, the *Volendam* sailed from Quebec to Buenos Aires with Siegfried Janzen accompanying the *Kanadier* group. There was no passable road into the infant colony, and about a third of the immigrants, disheartened, returned to Canada. Those who remained established the colonies of Bergthal and Sommerfeld.

The *Volendam* made one more South American voyage, leaving Rotterdam on October 7, 1948, for Buenos Aires with 827 refugees from Russia, 751 from West Prussia and 115 individuals sponsored by the Hutterite colony in Primavera, Paraguay. This brought the total

number of refugees arriving in South America from Europe between 1947 and 1948 to 5,616.

By the end of 1948, most of the Russian Mennonite refugees had left Europe. The *Volendam*’s work continued, carrying Dutch immigrants to new homes in Canada. By now, the ship was showing her age. Transatlantic flight was becoming more common, and passenger ship service declined. At the end of 1951, the *Volendam* made her last Rotterdam-Quebec-Rotterdam voyage. She was scrapped the following year at Hendrik Ido Ambacht, an island off the coast of the Netherlands.

The Mennonite colony named after her continues, although its population has dwindled from the original 1,913 to 563 (2006 statistics). The beginnings of the colony were fraught with difficulties. Of the 440 founding families, 110 consisted of women with children. As well, the colony had to care for the sick and elderly. To escape poverty and harsh living conditions, individual families soon emigrated to Canada, Germany and Brazil. Since the 1970s, mechanization and the cultivation of wheat,

along with the introduction of soya, maize and livestock, have increased the level of prosperity in the colony. In 2014, the Volendam cooperative invested \$2,000,000 to renew its port on the Paraguay River, the Mbopi Cua, which will have the capacity to handle 300 tons of grain per hour (“Volendam invierte,” translated by Google).

On the seas, the *Volendam* name is currently carried on by a Holland America cruise ship of the same name. Its summer port is Vancouver, BC.

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The State and the Mennonite Church in German-speaking Europe

By Robert Martens

In summer of 2014, a note from a visitor to the MHSBC office was passed on to me. It indicated that a development worth “celebrating and publicizing” had occurred in Austria. After nearly five hundred years, the note pointed out, the Austrian state had finally officially recognized the Mennonite Church, which would now, among other privileges, be exempt from taxation. Furthermore, the note went on, Rev. John N. Klassen from the Clearbrook MB Church had detailed information on the topic. Would this material be suitable for an article in *Roots and Branches*?

A few days later I interviewed John N. Klassen on the happenings in Austria – but to talk about Austria, Klassen remarked, it is necessary to speak about Germany and Switzerland as well. Much of the following is based on that interview.

John N. Klassen does indeed possess a wealth of de-

tailed information on the topic. He was born in 1929 in Steinfeld, Germany, and immigrated to Canada in 1948. John and his wife, Mary (née Goerzen), raised three children. John worked for a time as a carpenter in Canada, and then went on to earn a Bachelor of Theology at the Bible College in Winnipeg in 1960. He later achieved several more degrees at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, Fresno State College, Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, and the University of South Africa. He has written and edited extensively.

Klassen’s understanding of Mennonite churches in Europe, however, is based not so much on education as on experience. He served for twenty-seven years as pastor to various German congregations, beginning with Neustadt in 1960; taught in European church schools and worked in school administration; and was co-founder of the Bibelseminar Bonn (Bonn Seminary). Klassen worked for Mennonite Brethren Missions, but his work in Europe extended well beyond that.

Austrian Anabaptist beginnings

There were only a few Mennonites in Austria after the First World War, says Klassen. A few Austrian soldiers had brought Mennonite brides back with them from Russia, but this was a very rare occurrence. How then had an Anabaptist-Mennonite church come to exist at all in Austria, especially in light of its inauspicious beginnings?

After unimaginably brutal persecution, the early Anabaptists in Austria had disappeared almost entirely. Preachers for the cause such as Hans Hut and Balthasar Hubmaier worked passionately on behalf of the emerging community but it was to no avail. Archduke Ferdinand, later the Holy Roman emperor, ignored the advice of clergy more tolerant of Anabaptist believers and suppressed the new reformers with a vicious paranoia nearly unsurpassed in Europe. The Hutterite wing of the Anabaptist movement bravely stood their ground; eventually, though, the persecution was too much for them as well, and they migrated eastward by steps to Russia and finally moved to North America en masse. By 1550, Anabaptism had all but vanished from Austria. It would be several hundred years before Anabaptist-Mennonites would reappear in the land.

Mennonite Brethren (MB) outreach

The story of Mennonites in German-speaking countries is a transnational one. After the Second World War, Henry and Margaretha (Harms) Koop Warkentin travelled from the United States to perform aid work among Mennonite refugees. Much of their work was focused on the huge refugee camp in Linz, Austria. The Warkentins, says Klassen, presented films and provided food and spiritual comfort to the refugees and helped establish an MB church in the Austrian town of Steyr.

J. W. Vogt worked in Austria for MB Missions before he went to Germany and pastored a fledgling congregation in Neuwied, a town on the banks of the Rhine and not far from Frankfurt. The new Neuwied church was established in 1951 by Russian and Polish refugees, with a few native Germans among them. This, Klassen says, was the first MB church in Europe. A meetinghouse was acquired in 1956. There was, however, already a Neuwied Mennonite church that had been founded way back in 1681, and friction developed between the congregations. Klassen points out that it had been tradition-

ally accepted that there would be a single Mennonite denomination per town or village, and the new church upset the applecart. C. F. Klassen intervened somewhat, says Klassen, and counselled MBs to follow their hearts and establish their own *Gemeinde* (congregation). The situation was later further complicated by the arrival from the Soviet Union in the late 1960s of Mennonite *Aussiedler* (immigrants; literally, “out-settlers”), who founded a third church in Neuwied. The services of the *Aussiedler* were lengthy and frequent. The 1681 group, says Klassen, was not nearly so pious. The result, he says, was three different buildings and a lack of association between the three churches.

There was, however, already a Neuwied Mennonite church that had been founded way back in 1681, and friction developed between the congregations.

Interlude #1: the Swiss

Mennonites in Switzerland, says Klassen, sent missionaries to Austria early on. The numerous workers in Europe for the North American MB Board of Missions and Services were, in a sense, heirs to their work. Helmut and Doris Funck, from southern Germany, were sent by the Swiss to work in Vienna. The couple eventually joined the MBs in mission work.

Switzerland was the birthplace of Anabaptism, and Swiss Mennonites constitute the oldest stream of the Anabaptist movement. Many in the “Swiss Mennonite” stream (“Swiss Mennonites” are often defined in contradistinction to “Russian Mennonites,” who moved from northern European lowlands to Russia and from there to North America and beyond) immigrated to North America, some arriving there as early

as the seventeenth century. Still, in 2003 there were fourteen Mennonite congregations with a total of about 2500 members in Switzerland. The use of French in these churches has increased, but the ties of Mennonites in Switzerland with their counterparts in Austria and Germany have usually been fairly strong.

Among the many MB missionaries charged with planting churches in Europe was John N. Klassen, who pastored in Neustadt, Germany, beginning in 1960. He was the second MB to be sent there.

Expansion of MB mission work

Other prominent MB mission workers in Europe were Lawrence and Selma Warkentin, who led church activities in Wels, Austria. About 1969, says Klassen, they came into contact with a Mennonite returnee from South America, who was initially not a believer but then

experienced a conversion. Since he was living in Bavaria, he suggested that the Warkentins help set up a church there, and so it happened that the missionary couple served alternately in Austria and Bavaria. Technically, Bavaria is of course part of Germany (although some Bavarians might argue the point), but at that time its churches were so far distant from northern German congregations that they associated at first with the Austrians.

The notion of a “church conference,” says Klassen, was at first a foreign concept to Europeans. Abe and Irene Neufeld, who were evangelizing in Linz, helped set up an MB Conference, which was at first European, not national. Annual meetings alternated between Germany and Austria. As travel was still difficult in those days – cars were a luxury and delegates would sometimes arrive on bicycle, says Klassen – it was decided that autonomous German and Austrian conferences would be formed. Bavaria’s member churches at first met with the Austrians, and eventually formed their own conference.

Abe and Irene Neufeld were enjoying some success in their Austrian mission work, particularly in Vienna; the group of churches they helped found were commonly called the *Tulpengasse*, named after the location of the first MB congregation established in the land. Austrian MB churches eventually were organized as the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Brüdergemeinden in Österreich* (AMBO: Conference of MB Churches in Austria).

A European federation was still maintained: the *Bund Europäischer Mennonitischer Brüdergemeinden* (BEMB: Federation of European MB Churches) worked together in active church outreach. The *Quelle des Lebens* (Fountain of Life) newsletter and radio broadcast, for example, began as Federation activities in 1957 and continued for many years. In 2003 the *Bund* was comprised of thirteen congregations and 5,620 members.

In recent years, MB churches have increasingly been cooperating with mainline evangelical churches, and in some cases traditional “Anabaptist” values may have been deemed secondary. A German Mennonite pastor has also criticized MBs for being divisive, stating that “sometimes some MB churches have been more willing to work with evangelicals than with other MB congregations who think differently than themselves” (Neufeld 135 trans. RM).



Weierhof Mennonite Historical Research Centre

Interlude #2: The “Old” Mennonite Church in Germany State recognition of the various German churches was slow in coming, says John Klassen. In 1555, Protestants (Lutherans) were officially recognized in Germany (as it then was) by the Augsburg Synod; after the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648, the Reformed were officially sanctioned; and in 1834 the German Baptists structured themselves as a church, but were badly harassed by the state until they were eventually officially recognized in 1918, after the First World War. Mennonite churches had a more difficult time than most in establishing themselves as “worthy” German citizens. Many German Mennonites, dismayed with issues such as taxation and militarization, left for Russia in 1789 and in the following decades.

Mennonites who stayed in Germany became engaged in a lengthy dance of alternately – sometimes simultaneously – distancing themselves from the state and embracing it. Eventually, many Anabaptist-Mennonite distinctives were lost, and Mennonites substantially assimilated into the emerging German nation. Participation in the military became commonplace for young Mennonite men; before and during World War II, integration with the Reich was so complete that Mennonite churches tended to cooperate with Hitler’s regime. (This history has been admirably told by Mark Jantzen in his book

Mennonite German Soldiers; see review in *Roots and Branches* Jul. 2013.)

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Mennonite Church in Germany needed to reinvent itself. Peace and social concerns once again found a place in Mennonite congregations; nursing homes were established; the role of women in church life expanded; relief work was carried out through the *Internationale Mennonitische Organisation*, and social

work through *Christliche Dienste* (Christian Services), frequently in cooperation with MCC. Brazilian-born scholar and theologian Fernando Ens played a large role in the World Council of Churches’ “Decade to Overcome Violence,” beginning in 2001.

Before the war, Mennonite congregations had been divided into three regional conferences, each with its own strong personality. It was felt that now was the time for greater cooperation. In 1990 the three conferences united under the umbrella of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*

Mennonitischer Gemeinden (AMG: Conference of Mennonite Churches). Data released in 2013 showed that the conference was comprised of 56 churches and 4,951 members. The AMG publishes a national periodical, *Die Brücke* (The Bridge), and has developed a special partnership with Meserete Kristos, the rapidly expanding Ethiopian Mennonite Church (see Richard Thiessen's report in *Roots and Branches*, May and Oct. 2010).

Interlude #3: The Aussiedler

It had been hoped that the AMG could unite all Mennonites living in Germany, but the enormous wave of *Aussiedler*, "ethnic German Russians" emigrating from Russia to Germany with solid support from the German government, defeated that goal. John N. Klassen reports that he was living in Europe during the entire time of the major influx into Germany of the *Aussiedler*. Between 1951, when the government's *Aussiedlerprogramm* began, and the year 2000, over 4,000,000 immigrants arrived in Germany from Eastern Bloc countries and over 2,700,000 from USSR/Russia alone. Among these, those classified as "free church" – that is, Baptist and Mennonite – numbered 280,000 to 290,000.

The Mennonite *Aussiedler* brought along with them a conservative lifestyle that had sustained them through the hardships of the Soviet Union. Many of them chose to form their own congregations rather than join the AMG. Two Mennonite historians comment that, in the context of the fall of the Berlin Wall "with its hopes for a revival of German society, this failure to form a united Mennonite organization was felt as a bitter disappointment by many in the AMG, and is still a lingering regret" (Fehr & Lichti 141).

Finally, official recognition in Austria

And this in a sense brings us full circle back to the note received in the MHSBC office.

In 2013 it was reported that the "free churches" of Austria were close to state recognition. Earlier attempts by individual denominations, the Mennonites included, to gain official recognition had failed. Free churches

were defined by the Austrian government only as "confessional organizations." The stumbling block was numbers: in order to receive official recognition, a church must have a membership of .02 percent of Austria's total population, or approximately 17,000 persons. No individual free church had anywhere near that number. In 2013 the Austrian Catholic Church was by far the largest, with 5,600,000 members; and the Protestant

Church followed with 320,000 – although Austria's 350,000 Muslims outnumbered the latter (out of 8,400,000 total population). A major hindrance to recognition was that the free churches did not count children among their membership as the state churches did.

However, if Austria's five free churches were counted together, they would number about 20,000, above the threshold for state recognition. Under the leadership of Walter Klimt, secretary-general of the Austrian

Baptists, the four free churches amalgamated as a single organization; these included the Free Christian Pentecostal Church, the Union of Baptist Churches, the Mennonite Free Church, and the Elaia Churches (the latter unites a number of churches under its umbrella).

Differences between these denominations were discussed. "We have realized that we have a lot in common in the essence and that we differ only in nuances," said Klimt (Weiss 1). The largest gap to be bridged was considered to be the charismatic nature of the Pentecostals and the Elaia, which might not appeal to the other evangelical churches in the organization. Reinhard Kummer, president of the Mennonite Free Church, remarked that this was a problem only for older individuals. "Among the young folks these differences hardly exist in practice," he stated (Weiss 1).

Finally, in August 2013, the Austrian state granted official recognition to the free churches of the land. For Mennonites, this came nearly five hundred years after their Anabaptist inception. Along with the other free churches, the Free Mennonite Church could now claim tax-exempt status, teach religious classes in schools, and offer counselling in hospitals. Difficulties, however, will remain at the local level, predicts John N. Klassen. For example, if a free church is not popular in an area, if the



Aussiedler children waiting to board a train that would take them to Germany. Source: Franz Thiessen. *Neuendorf*, p. 398

proselytization and growth of the free church is resented, harassment could appear in such ways as delays in building permits.

Afterthought

An Anabaptist Museum (*Täufermuseum*) has been established some forty-five kilometres north of Vienna. It is part of the *Museumsdorf Niedersulz*, an “open-air site” consisting of eighty historical buildings that were torn down and then renovated and laid out as a complete village.

Another Austrian *Täufermuseum* is ensconced in the ruins of Falkenstein Castle, north of Vienna and near the border with the Czech Republic. It focuses on the Hutterite story, and features a fifteen-metre galley ship commemorating the sentencing of ninety Hutterites who were sentenced to galley service when they refused to recant. Reinhold Eichinger, head of the Museum committee, says, “Many Austrians think that the ‘free churches’ – the evangelicals – are American sects. They have no idea that these are ‘spiritual fruit’ of the Reformation period in this land” (Dueck).

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A Mennonite Confession of Peace (Friedensbekenntnis der Mennoniten)

Introduced and translated by Robert Martens

Except for a very few, German Mennonites had abandoned their peace principles by the time Adolf Hitler assumed power. The vast majority acquiesced to the new order. German Hutterites, however, maintained their peace stance, and so did the Bruderhof, founded in 1920 by Eberhard Arnold in Germany. In 1930 the Bruderhof attached themselves to the Hutterite movement, and actively maintained their dedication to the cause of peace, even writing a respectful letter to Adolf Hitler in 1933.

At the 1936 Mennonite World Conference held in Amsterdam, a good number of German Mennonites were in attendance. Those were difficult times: the world remained in the throes of the Great Depression, and Europe seemed to be preparing for war. Under those conditions, perhaps it was natural that the focus of the conference was historical and self-defining. Who are Mennonites and what do they stand for were the questions of the day.

One answer was the creation of the International Mennonite Peace Committee (*Internationales Mennonitisches Friedenskomitee*). About twenty men gathered at Freedeshiem, a quiet spot near Steenwijk, Netherlands. The committee members consisted of the entire American delegation, a few Dutch, a Danziger – reportedly a certain Herr Fast from Wernigerode (though his name is

not on the document) – and two Bruderhof representatives. The German presence, then, was limited.

The International Mennonite Peace Committee was of some service to Hutterites who were forced out of Germany, but little else was accomplished – its work was interrupted by the Second World War. The Committee did reorganize in 1949, again in Holland.

The Confession of Peace crafted by the Committee is translated below:

We, the undersigned Mennonites: groups, organizations and individuals from around the world,

standing in our faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which calls humankind to the service of peace and to the struggle against the sin of war,

and in our conviction that the detestable plans for war and stockpiling of weapons that are steadily increasing among all peoples will be judged by God,

urge all Mennonites of the world to fulfill the task which God has entrusted to us through our Mennonite forebears: proclaiming the Gospel of peace.

We submit the request to our brothers and sisters in all of our church communities (*Gemeinden*) to witness energetically to our fundamental principles of peace and to demonstrate our preparedness to affirm that we serve in the Spirit of Christ. We wish to work together to make the vocation of peace a reality, so that we can provide spiritual and material aid to those who have been called by God to refuse military service, or to those whose disposition to peace has caused them suffering.

Signed: L. G. D. Knipscheer, Fritz Kuiper, Harold S. Bender, Hans Zumpe, C. F. Klassen, D. Attema ter Meulen, P. C. Hiebert, Orie O. Miller, P. R. Schroeder, David Toews, Emmy Arnold, H. Brouwer, Richard Nickel, W. Mesdag, J. C. Dirkmaat, Jan Gleysteen, C. Henry Smith, T. O. Hylkema, J. M. Lendeertz. Chair: Harold S. Bender. Secretary-treasurer: Jacob ter Meulen.

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A Paraguayan Mennonite Declaration on Nonresistance

Before and during the Second World War, some of those living in the Paraguayan Mennonite colonies were infected by the social psychosis emanating from Nazi Germany. There were individuals, though, who took a strong stand against Third Reich propaganda, and a memorandum written by a group of Paraguayan Mennonites attests to that. The following appeared in *Menno Blatt*, a Paraguayan Mennonite newspaper, in 1943. Thanks to local Abbotsford historian Wilfried Hein for supplying this item.

Denkschrift (Memorandum)

Translated by Robert Martens

We the undersigned, Mennonites from Fernheim Colony, Chaco/Paraguay, South America, declare with our personal signatures the following:

I. We as Mennonites firmly embrace the principle of nonresistance as taught by Holy Scripture and handed down to us by our forebears through their steadfast faith and example. This biblical teaching must be resolutely adhered to in our homes, schools, and churches; and must especially be practised, intensified, and advocated in our daily lives in order to keep our community of believers free from alien influences and all political struggles.

II. We base the stance articulated in this memorandum on the following principles:

a) Because Jesus and Holy Scripture proclaim the doctrine of nonresistance.

b) Because a "cloud of witnesses" – namely the Christians of the first century AD, later the Waldensians, Albigenians; and for 400 years the Anabaptists of Switzerland, Moravia, southern Germany and the Netherlands – practised Jesus Christ's teachings of peace, thus blessing their communities, even while they sacrificed home, citizens' rights, family, and possessions for their principles.

c) Because we Russian Mennonites have literally experienced how God, in the fearful chaos of the Russian Revolution that followed the First World War, with His strong arm miraculously protected the nonresisting from those armed with weapons; and indeed rescued us personally and finally gave us and our children a peaceful home in Paraguay, where we live unhindered from prac-

tising our beliefs and convictions.

d) Because today we see the great plight of the homeland of our forebears, and even Holland, Germany, Poland, and especially our unhappy motherland Russia; which in the aftermath of the bloody and appalling Second World War have fallen victim to revolution and militarism.

e) Because we are strongly convinced that all the peoples of the earth fallen victim to militarism are longing intensely for peace.

f) Because in the Bible (Old and New Testaments) we find the only true way to a Christlike life; and that an abiding answer lies not in the countless miseries of militarism, but in the teachings of peace.

g) Because we believe that the reckless surrender of the teachings of peace would mean a sure death for Mennonites as such; but that especially for our group would result in a fruitless way of life in every respect.

III. We declare as well that we stand in solidarity with the greater Mennonite community that currently is allied with other nonresistant groups such as the Quakers and Tunkers; and that rather than actively pursuing participation in war, endeavours to aid in word and deed those who have been injured by war.

IV. We perceive our stated duty to be of service to our neighbours and to Paraguay, our fatherland; and to cooperate as loyal citizens in the development of the Chaco.

We are motivated all the more in this duty because the national government of Paraguay welcomed us so warmly, and documented special rights for us and our descendants in a formal Privilegium. [rights and privileges granted to Mennonite settlers by the Paraguayan state, as had occurred earlier in Russia] We wish to be of assistance to the state and its people, as the prophet Jeremiah instructs in chapter 29, verse 7: "Seek the welfare of any city to which I have carried you off, and pray to the Lord for it; on its welfare your welfare will depend." [New English Bible]

With thanks for the freedom granted to us, and trusting in God's further support; and with the intent of living out the principles listed above; we set our names on this memorandum that will be read before an assembly in the village of Walsdesruh on July 7, 1943.

Drafted in the month of July, 1943, Fernheim Colony, Chaco, Paraguay, South America.

Book Reviews

Alexander Vasilyevich Kolchak and His Regime in Omsk, Siberia

A book review of David Funk's first novel follows. The novel is a historical fiction set in pre- and post-Revolutionary Siberia, region of Omsk.

By Robert Martens

Very often the histories of Russian Mennonites focus on settlements in European Russia. Not so well-known are the Mennonite villages in the Siberia region. Today, Siberia conjures up images of exile, prison camps, harsh winters, and the deaths of perhaps millions of slave labourers under Stalin's totalitarian regime. Before 1917, however, the Siberian city of Omsk was a gateway to settlement in the vast steppes that surrounded it – and was itself a destination for Mennonite migrants. In contrast to the tradition of settling in rural colonies in western Russia, Mennonites in Siberia seemed drawn to urban life. These migrants to Siberia were often prosperous: they were retailers, bankers, factory owners, mill owners, professionals – there was even an oculist by the name of Jakob Isaak (Krahn 1).

Omsk, situated on the confluence of the Om and Irtysh Rivers, was a trading and business hub, and Mennonites knew that prospects there were good for entrepreneurs; the city was known as "the Chicago of Siberia." Of course Mennonite colonies that were relatively isolated from the Russian mainstream proliferated in Siberia as well – in fact there were over one hundred. The city of Omsk, though, remained the financial and economic centre of the region, and a cluster of Mennonites settled in the village of Kulomzino – later called Novo-Omsk – just across the Irtysh River from Omsk and next to the railroad station. The station was a hub for an enormous network of railways, including the great Trans-Siberian (see Huebert/Schroeder 44, 45.)

Peace and prosperity came to a sudden end. After the 1917 February Revolution in which democrat Alexander Kerensky came to power, and especially after the October Bolshevik Revolution of the same year, it seemed that hell descended upon Omsk. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had taken Russia out of the First World War. Soon afterwards the country disintegrated into civil war, and in Siberia a multitude of armies fought each other for control; these forces included Bolsheviks,

Whites, Socialist Revolutionaries, and even foreign interventionist militaries sent to Russia to re-establish social order and perhaps bring Russia back into the War. At the centre of this bloody whirlwind was a talented and charismatic Russian naval officer, Alexander Kolchak. Today he remains such a controversial figure that the alleged facts of his life vary wildly.

Early life

Alexander Vasilyevich Kolchak was born in 1874 near St. Petersburg. Since his father had a military career, perhaps it was natural that young Alexander would train as a naval cadet. He was a brilliant man, and learned quickly. In 1899 he joined a polar expedition in the Arctic under the leadership of Edouard von Toll, a Baltic German. Kolchak did research in hydrology and oceanography on the expedition;

he would later publish several studies on glaciology, and was highly regarded in the field. In 1902 von Toll was lost in the Arctic. A search team led by Kolchak ended in failure: only a few diaries and some equipment were found. His northern expeditions also ended badly for Kolchak: he developed life-long rheumatism from exposure to ice and wind.

Then in 1904, just as Kolchak was preparing to marry Sophia Omirova, the Russo-Japanese War broke out; it was an unmitigated disaster for the Russian Empire. Kolchak himself was wounded in Port Arthur and imprisoned for four months in Nagasaki. Because of his ill health, he was repatriated before the war ended. He immediately devoted himself to rebuilding the Russian navy, and was involved in the construction of two ice-breakers.

War and revolution

The “war to end all wars” began in 1914. Kolchak was promoted to Rear Admiral at an exceptionally young age, and was sent to establish a defensive minefield in the Baltic Sea. He was always, it was said, personally involved in the dangerous work. He was then made Commander of the Black Sea fleet, but the fleet disintegrated

after the February Revolution in 1917. Kolchak then travelled back to St. Petersburg, where he declared in the Provisional Government Assembly that the military could only be saved through harsh disciplinary measures. Right wing nationalists took notice, agitating for a leadership role for Kolchak. It appears that Alexander Kerensky, who was then Naval Minister, did not like the competition, and ordered Kolchak to travel to America on a military mission. Kolchak did as ordered, and while in the United States, he was offered a teaching job at the Naval Academy in San Francisco. He turned down the job offer. How different his life would have been had he accepted.



Kolchak shortly before he was executed. Source: Wikipedia

When Kolchak heard about the October Revolution – he was in Japan at the time – he offered to enlist in the British armed forces. Throughout his rather brief life, Kolchak was an admirer of all things British. The United Kingdom, however, had other

ideas, and recommended that Kolchak return to Russia to overthrow Lenin and bring order back to the land. According to various sources, Kolchak did so either “with alacrity” (Pereira 1) or “with a heavy sense of foreboding” (“Alexander Kolchak” 4). In 1918 he arrived in Omsk.

The Provisional All-Russian Government

Omsk was a city in chaos, with different factions contending for power and overwhelmed by refugees flooding into it from the surrounding area. The city was now ruled by the Provisional All-Russian Government, comprised of royalists, landowners, and factory owners, as well as members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SR) – an uneasy coalition to say the least. The prestigious Kolchak, regarded as honest and able, was immediately appointed as a minister in the government. In 1918 Cossack troops arrested the SR members of government, and Kolchak was voted by the remaining cabinet members as Supreme Leader. “The Council of Ministers,” he wrote in a manifesto, “having all the power in its hands, has invested me, Admiral Alexander Kolchak, with this power. I have accepted this responsibility in the exceptionally difficult circumstances of civil war and complete

disorganization of the country, and I now make it known that I shall follow neither the reactionary path nor the deadly path of party strife" ("Alexander Kolchak" 4).

Moderate words – but Kolchak's critics charge that he acted despotically, indulging in mass flogging and the razing of villages. They also accuse him of up to 25,000 killings in Yekaterinburg alone; this figure is likely a gross exaggeration. Nevertheless, when an anti-Kolchak uprising was staged on December 22, 1918, it was put down savagely by Cossack and Czech troops. On December 23, they ranged throughout the village of Kulomzino, raping and murdering anyone even faintly suspected of conspiracy. At least five hundred were killed, perhaps many more. Local Mennonites were surely eyewitnesses to the atrocities.

Failure

The situation was dire. Socialist Revolutionaries, Bolsheviks, Whites, and foreign military – among the latter were Czechs, British, French, Americans, Japanese, Italians, Greeks, and even Canadians – were all involved in the struggle for power. Kolchak harshly suppressed the Bolsheviks, dispersed trade unions, returned factories to their owners, and acknowledged Russia's foreign debt. For a time his army of possibly 200,000 gained ground as far as Ufa – another region of Mennonite settlement – but eventually they were driven back by the better armed and more populous Reds. In the end, Kolchak's regime collapsed completely, and Siberians, including Mennonites, were left in the hands of the even more ferocious Bolsheviks.

Why did Kolchak fail so utterly? The reasons are, of course, many and complex: he failed to work well with differing factions; he relied excessively on foreign aid; as a naval officer he had no experience in ground fighting; and his administration was incompetent and often brutal. Kolchak also seemed to have lost his passion for the battle. D. N. Fedotov, who served under Kolchak in Siberia, described him as "aged and different from the active, energetic man he was when I knew him in the navy in the old days. There was something fatalistic about him which I had never noticed before. [He looked] thoroughly tired of groping and struggling in an unfamiliar environment" (qtd McLaughlin 5). Ultimately, however, the coalition over which he presided may simply have been ungovernable.

In the end, Kolchak's regime collapsed completely, and Siberians, including Mennonites, were left in the hands of the even more ferocious Bolsheviks.

Death, and an afternote

In November 1919 the Reds entered Omsk without resistance. Admiral Kolchak had fled one month earlier, seeking safe passage to the coast. By this time, even his foreign allies had tired of his autocratic ways, and he was handed over to leftists in Irkutsk after being promised that he would be delivered to the British Embassy. For nine days he was interrogated – reportedly he was courteously treated but that is hard to imagine – and then in January 1920 was shot by firing squad along with his former prime minister. Their bodies were kicked under the ice of a nearby frozen river. Today a monument to Kolchak stands near the river where he died.

Alexander Kolchak had married Sofia Omirova, and the couple had three children, two of whom died. Sofia waited in Sevastopol for her husband until 1919, then left for Paris, where she died in 1956. Interestingly, however, perhaps Alexander's true love was a flamboyant poet and artist, Anna Timiryova, whom he met in 1915. For years, they carried on a passionate affair. When Alexander was arrested in Irkutsk, Anna showed up at the prison and announced, "Arrest me. I cannot live without him" (Anna Timiryova 1). She would later pay for her relationship with an "enemy of the state": between 1920 and 1949 she was arrested multiple times. Timiryova was "rehabilitated" in 1960 and died in 1975.

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Reviewed by Robert Martens

In his fine first novel, Abbotsford resident David Funk has chosen to highlight the Mennonite experience in Siberia, which was quite different from that of European Russia. Many Mennonite settlers in the Omsk area were already on the path to assimilation, and had mingled far more readily with the Russian mainstream. The novel's main character, Heinrich Rempel, has no agricultural skills of any kind; he is solely a businessman. Furthermore, in Siberia the brutal oppression that disrupted Mennonite life emanated from both right and left, very unlike the Ukrainian experience, for example, where the violence came mostly from the left. *On the Banks of the Irtysh River* depicts the Omsk-based rightist regime of Alexander Kolchak as equally malevolent as the Bolshevik tyranny that followed. The novel provides fresh insights into an era of Mennonite history that is often overlooked.

The story begins with its end: the Rempel family have escaped the Russian chaos and are travelling on the S.S. *Melita* to begin a new life in Canada. A British doctor, formerly involved with the Allied military intervention in post-revolutionary Russia, has befriended the family. In the novel, he is telling the story, but the first-person narrative transitions, a little awkwardly, into a full account of the Rempels' experiences. The reader consequently knows the conclusion of the story before it really begins, but there are some great surprises in the plot nevertheless, and enhanced by some compassionate and vivid writing.

Funk's novel centres on a theme of faith and despair. His Mennonite characters, progressive as they may be, are yet somehow innocent of the workings of the world.

At least the men are; the women seem to have a better understanding. Heinrich Rempel is convinced that God will always supply the family's needs, and that a simple faith is all that is necessary. His wife, Katy, has a far more realistic point of view: "Long before all those armies of German boots were churning Russian dirt to dust and mud in far off Ukraine," she says, "I had already laid to rest three children in that same black Russian soil and my heart was broken into ever smaller pieces with each new death. It didn't take a war to bring trouble to our

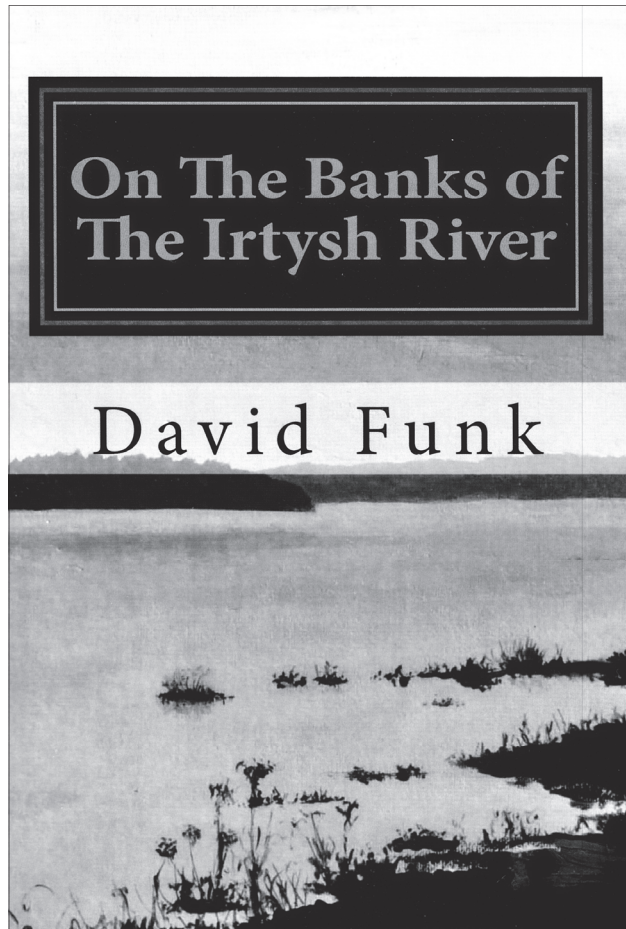
family. Trouble is a fact of life" (19).

The novel depicts the Rempel family's move from western Russia to the village of Kulomzino, on the banks of the Irtysh River, where Heinrich has dreams of opening a farm implement retail business. Along the way, the reader is given a glimpse into the rot of aristocratic Russia through the eyes of Heinrich's son, Henry. Upon being settled in Kulomzino, Henry befriends a local Russian boy from the class of the perennially impoverished. Heinrich encourages the friendship, and indeed he and Katy become close friends with their neighbours, the Sarkovskys, who are Socialists. The Rempels are not at all the stereotypical insular Mennonite colonists.

And then, with the two Russian Revolutions and subsequent

civil war, the Rempels' life begins to unravel. Heinrich's business stalls and then stops completely. Refugees flood Omsk and Kulomzino. It is Katy who instigates a new plan for a new time: Heinrich's intended warehouse is converted into a block of apartments, and for a time, Russians and Mennonites live together in "an oasis of peace" (chap. title). And Heinrich learns that his Christian ideals are not so different from those of his Bolshevik friend, Lepinov, "whose utopian dream for his family was driven by a desire to have a leak-proof roof to sleep under, plenty of good bread to fill the stomach, and honest work to bring dignity to a man's soul" (125).

On December 22 and 23, 1918, an uprising is launched by Bolsheviks (or perhaps Socialists; the facts



are somewhat hazy) against Kolchak's counter-revolutionary coalition government in Omsk. Cossacks suppress the revolt with unspeakable brutality. Heinrich watches from his window as a Cossack horseman effortlessly rides down a fleeing villager and slices him open with his bayonet – then turns to Rempel's window, sees him, and smiles. From that day on, Heinrich is afflicted with a growing trauma, even feeling complicit in the Cossack murder because of this momentary communication of a smile.

Kolchak's regime is overthrown, and another reign of terror, that of the Bolsheviks, begins. "Different faces behind the guns, same inhumanity," says Heinrich. "Whites, Reds, they're all the same!" (187) Smitten by all the tragedy, Heinrich despairs. "Why did our Lord teach us to pray, 'Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil' when he himself was not saved from the time of trial and he certainly was not delivered from evil?" says Heinrich to an elder. "He was tortured and died at the hands of murderers! Evil is rampant and our lives are upon trial. The prayer makes a mockery of God who remains silent and distant as the stars. I cannot fathom it" (197).

The novel ends with some powerful reflections. Safely upon the S.S. Melita, Heinrich speaks with the ship's surgeon: "We thought that God could control the events of our lives and that when we suffered it was for our good. A comfortable theology in prosperous times" (221). He has many questions, he says. "I would like to believe," he continues, "that God is with us, that in the midst of our misfortunes, perhaps, He is like the air we breathe, present to sustain us, to give us the strength to endure and to live when our hearts are breaking and we have lost all hope. Otherwise, how could I have the courage to go on?" (222)

David Funk is a talented artist as well as a writer. His novel can be accessed at the MHSBC office. He has since written another novel, The Last Train to Leningrad.

Hein lived a full life – but it is his controversial role as interpreter for the German army that might most attract the public's attention.

Wilfried Hein, editor and translator.

***A Witness in Times of War and Peace: The Story of Gerhard Hein, a Mennonite Pastor Who Served in the Wehrmacht During World War II.* Victoria: Friesen Press, 2015. 335 pp.**

Reviewed by Robert Martens

In 2015, Abbotsford resident Wilf Hein attended a conference held in Münster, Germany, the city that witnessed a violent Anabaptist uprising in the 1530s. The session, *Tagung über Mennoniten in der NS-Zeit* (Conference on Mennonites in the Time of National Socialism), was sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society of Germany (*Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein*). The intent was to study the role of German Mennonites in the Third Reich – a role that was frequently characterized by complicity. When the Second World War broke out, German Mennonites had largely abandoned their principles of nonresistance and separation from the state.

For several years previous to the conference, Hein had been translating and organizing the memoirs of his father, Gerhard Hein, a prominent Mennonite historian and pastor who was born in South Russia but lived most of his life in Germany. Gerhard Hein also served in the German Wehrmacht in the Second World War, working as interpreter and translator. Hein chose to present his father's memoirs to the Mennonite Historical Society. He wrote to the organizers of the conference, thanking them for arranging the Münster conference and praising them for their courage in providing a forum for a theme which is so frequently hushed up. His proposal included the following information:

"Historians are usually more interested in the original copies [of my father's memoirs] which can be found in the Weierhof Mennonite Research Centre. However, these memoirs, in two volumes of about 140 pages, are typewritten manuscripts with many corrections which are often difficult to decipher. Sadly, due to deteriorating health, my father was not able to develop the manuscript into a good copy.

My book is more legible, broader in focus and better organized. For example, my father relates certain instances of his personal conflict with the *Nationale Erhebung* (the National Socialist seizure of power) in the chapter titled "Engagement and Wedding." In my ver-

sion, these comments, as well as the paper he wrote critiquing Alfred Rosenberg's *Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (*Myths of the 20th Century*, a profoundly anti-Semitic book extolling the virtues of the Aryan race) are all included in Chapter 4: 'My Wartime Story.' ...

Also noteworthy is the fact that *A Witness in Times of War and Peace* contains much additional material, especially in the appendix, on the life of Gerhard Hein, not found in the original manuscript, including approximately sixty more recent photographs; documents, tables, sketches, maps; a selection and compilation of several articles and lectures; historical insights into Anabaptist history; acknowledgements; genealogy; his collected bibliography; preface and afterword; introduction and index; as well as an essay on the history of the Anabaptists and Mennonites by the author [W. Hein]." [trans. of the above two paragraphs from the German language by Louise Bergen Price]

Gerhard Hein's very interesting memoir, as translated by his son Wilf, extends from his early life in Ufa, Russia, to his later years in Germany, where he pastored several congregations, helped in refugee work and social aid projects, published historical studies, wrote poetry, and worked as editor of publications such as the *Mennonitisches Lexikon* (Mennonite Encyclopedia). Hein lived a full life – but it is his controversial role as interpreter for the German army that might most attract the public's attention. To serve in the Wehrmacht was not an easy decision for Gerhard Hein; this is apparent in his Christmas sermon delivered in Russia to members of the German military in 1943, when the war was finally turning against the Third Reich. In this sermon, Hein is walking a tightrope, speaking of peace to masters of war. The following extract is indicative of how carefully he shaped his thoughts (trans. by Wilf Hein):

"... Dear friends, we don't want to say that this [the birth of the Christ child] is only a message for small children and for naive people. It certainly is also a message for men and soldiers. It was not coincidental that it was to men to whom the Christmas message first had been proclaimed. They were strong, harsh shepherds who guard-

ed their sheep from wild animals and thieves during night. There were also men, even kings – as Scripture declares – who had come from a far distance to be the first to worship the child in the manger.

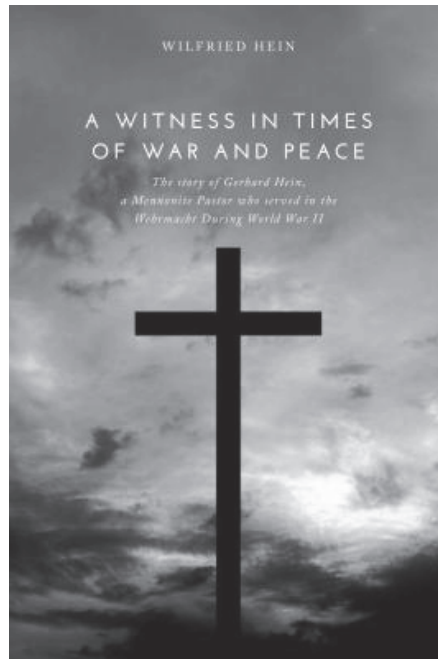
In a similar way, the German knights and kings of the Middle Ages, who certainly could not be considered weaklings, allowed themselves to be depicted by artists kneeling and worshipping the Holy Child in the manger or in the lap of His mother. Was this only a childish naivety of them or backwardness? No, it was rather a deep

insight into the significant truth of life: that of honouring the Holy One, from whom comes the greatest strength. Those who offer genuine humility towards the Almighty are rewarded with the greatest courage. Piety and heroism, the fear of God and courage did not stand in contradiction with the experience of knights and kings. In this they were right, and in this lay their greatness and strength.

As we can see, it is neither unmanly nor unfit for soldiers to celebrate Christmas as the birthday of our world's Saviour. Christmas wants to fill us with great joy and strengthen our faith. Otherwise Christmas would always remain a dark secret to us. But if celebrated in the right spirit, Christmas tells us that God, who controls and directs all our circumstances, and who is the creator of this world, is a God of love and mercy. Even if our personal experiences and the present developments in the world speak against it, the fact remains that God, who sent His Son into our world, will never abandon us, and will bring an end to injustice and meaninglessness. Everything has a purpose and an end, and this includes our sorrows, sufferings, trials and adversities we as individuals or as a whole nation may have to face. It is important to remain patient, strong, and confident in our outlook. We are to stand firm in our convictions without yielding to erroneous teachings in the battle we are ordered to pursue.

A time will come when light will dispel darkness, when truth will reveal the lie, when justice will replace injustice, and when order will be re-established. ..." (238-9)

A Witness in Times of War and Peace can be purchased online or accessed at the MHSBC library.



Press release: Mennonite Archival Image Database shortlisted for national award

Reported by Laureen Harder-Gissing

Friends of MAID,

A version of the following announcement was released to the press today. Please share with anyone you think would be interested. [The online Mennonite Archival Image Database (MAID) contains photographs of Mennonite life from the collections of its archival partners. The Mennonite Historical Society of BC is one of those partners.]

November 16, 2016: MAID shortlisted for the Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Community Programming

MAID was shortlisted for the 2016 Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Community Programming.

The award celebrates "small, volunteer-led community organizations in the creation of innovative programming that commemorates unique aspects of [Canadian] heritage." The judges identified MAID as "a very special project since it, in many ways, is helping to bring together a diasporic community" by sharing "heritage across vast distances, but also through the cooperation of archival professionals invested in the community."

"We feel honoured to be considered for an award in excellence in community programming," says site administrator Laureen Harder-Gissing, "since MAID is all about sharing Mennonite archival treasures with communities worldwide."

"By pooling our financial, organizational, and human capital, we found the resources to make MAID a reality," says Conrad Stoesz, chair of the MAID management group. "The partners include professional and volunteer-run archives. We are inspiring each other to improve the quality of our archival services and build stronger working relationships."

Volunteers and staff at the eight partner archives are busy scanning and uploading new photos daily, as well as providing verifiable information about each image. As MAID's reach grows, site visitors reach back to contribute facts and stories, order photographs online, and express their thanks. "The photo you sent me shows real people from the past with real struggles," wrote a visitor in Tasmania, "MAID is a truly wonderful project."

Laureen Harder-Gissing is the MAID site administrator, archivist-librarian at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, and director at the Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonites Studies at Conrad Grebel University College.

Press release: Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission

Stephanie Chase, Abe J. Dueck, Zacharie Leclair and Conrad Stoesz are the 2016 recipients of the MB Historical Commission's MB studies project grants.

Stephanie is an MA student at Briercrest Seminary. Her project title is "The Jesus of Whom I Speak: The Reconciliation of Nonviolent Discipleship and God's Violence, According to J. Denny Weaver and Miroslav Volf." Stephanie's project grant grows from wrestling with an Anabaptist-Mennonite commitment to nonviolent discipleship and a troubling awareness of Scripture's presentation of God in violent images.

Abe is a retired college professor from Canadian Mennonite University. His project title is "The Mennonite Brethren Bible College (1944-1992): Competing Visions for Mennonite Brethren Education in Canada." A comprehensive history of the MBBC period, one that documents a period that was marked by contested visions for what college, university, and ministry education should look like, has not been written. Abe's project addresses this gap.

Zacharie lectures in US history at the Université de Montréal. His project title is "Unconscientious' Objectors? Woodrow Wilson, Conscription, and Mennonite Conscientious Objectors, 1917-1918." Zacharie's project aims at understanding US President Woodrow Wilson's response to American Mennonites' objection to war. The Mennonite conscientious objectors posed an intellectual, spiritual and political problem for such a devout Protestant president as Wilson.

Conrad is an MA student in the joint program at the University of Winnipeg and University of Manitoba, and an archivist working halftime at the Mennonite Heritage Centre and halftime at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. His project title is "The Creation of Identity: Mennonite Conscientious Objectors in Western Canada through the Lens of Archives, A National Historical Society, and Memoirs." His project takes a historical approach but creates a bridge between the disciplines of archives and history.

Goodbye to Jim Baerg

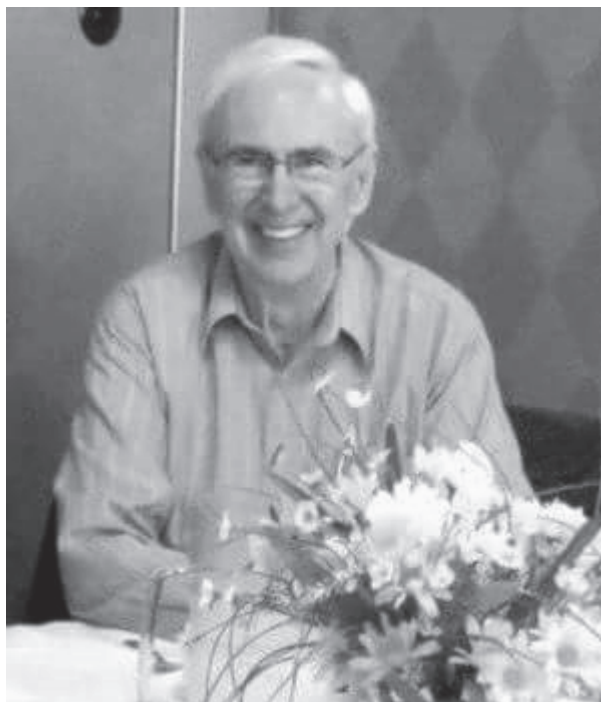
By Robert Martens

Jim Baerg, long-time board member and volunteer with the Mennonite Historical Society of BC, passed away on November 17, 2016. We have lost a dear friend and valued colleague. Each of us not only grieves at the passing of a tremendous individual but also for the loss his family is suffering. Our loving condolences to Joan, their family, Jim's brothers and their families and his many friends.

James Michael Baerg was born July 10, 1944, to Isaac and Elsie (Bergmann) Baerg. Jim, as he was popularly known, grew up in Abbotsford and attended Mennonite Educational Institute. He later studied at Simon Fraser University and Tabor College. In 1966 he married Joan Martens; the couple celebrated fifty years together in 2016.

Jim worked as a probation officer in Prince Rupert, Williams Lake, Surrey and Kelowna. He and Joan also taught on assignment with MCC in Jamaica for two years and worked with Youth for Christ in Williams Lake for

six years. After retirement in Abbotsford, Jim Baerg volunteered at MHSBC, where he was dearly loved.



Honouring Helmut Huebert

By Robert Martens

Anyone interested in Russian Mennonite history is sure to be acquainted with *Mennonite Historical Atlas*. This book was authored, together with William Schroeder (1933-2013), by Helmut Huebert, an orthopedic surgeon who lived much of his life in Winnipeg. *Mennonite Historical Atlas* remains to this day the best of its kind: it is a fundamental and entertaining source of information on the location, composition, and history of the Russian Mennonite colonies. Helmut Theodore Huebert died November 21, 2016.

Huebert, born in 1935, was involved in a number of historical projects, including the publication of *Events and People: Events in Russian Mennonite History and the People Who Made Them Happen*. He once wrote, "These history books and atlases do not represent dry, dusty pages to me, but show the lives and struggles of many people. My motivation is to make sure that their lives are not forgotten" ("Tribute" 1). Between 1970 and 2003, Huebert sat on the Historical

Committee of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches; much of this time he served as chair.

His life was a busy one – history was only one of his major interests. Huebert studied medicine at the University of Manitoba, and in 1966 he began working in the Winnipeg Clinic as well as in several hospitals. Meanwhile, he had married Dorothy Rempel in 1957 after a "whirlwind romance" ("Tribute" 1). Later, even while his historical interests and occupations never flagged, Huebert practised medicine in St. Kitts, Taiwan, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In 2010, Helmut Theodore Huebert donated his collection of historical research to the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. His spirit and passion will be deeply missed.



Photo: MB Herald

Sources

"Mennonite History Advocate Passes." *Mennonite Historian* Vol. 42 No. 4 (Dec 2016): 12.

"Tribute to Helmut T. Huebert." *Mennonite Brethren Herald*. 2016. www.mbherald.com

Christmas Echoes

A Christmas message delivered by Dr. Christian Neff (1863-1946) during World War II. It is based on Luke 2:13-14.

Translated from German into English by Wilf Hein

We have just experienced Advent and Christmas, the most wonderful annual celebration proclaiming peace and joy throughout the whole world. But how little of this can be observed during this time. War is raging throughout the world. Planes zoom over enemy territory, continually unleashing their destructive and deadly payloads. There cannot be a greater contrast than the one between celebrating Christmas and experiencing this terrible war. It is a disparity almost as great as the divide between heaven and earth, an inconsistency that pervades our entire lives. The results of war are injuries and much suffering, hot tempers and raging fury, mountains of lies and people hating each other, hardships and many troubles, uncertainties and indescribable grief, sorrows and paralyzing fear and numerous anxieties. Our world is filled with sin, misery and death. Advent and Christmas, in comparison, promise us the gifts of love and peace. They are gifts originating from a different world, from the eternal realms of heaven. This is precisely what the plain yet wonderful, uncomplicated and yet magnificent Christmas message desires to convey to us. The heavens opened above the fields of Bethlehem. The glory of the Lord shone upon earth and "suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angels, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favour rests.'"

In their heavenly song of praise, the angels proclaimed "Glory to God in the highest!" We, instead, dis-

honour God through our disgraceful actions during this present war. What a sharp contrast! Injustice rules the world. Nations are being deceived, and many lies are circulating. All this happens under the hypocritical excuse, "To the honour of God." We are asking ourselves repeatedly, how can something like this be possible? Is mankind so blind that it no longer recognizes what it means to honour God? Do we no longer understand what needs to be done to worship and respect God? Our daily prayer should be "Lord, please remove the obstructive veil from our eyes, so that we will be able to recognize what it means to bring glory to you." There is a way that can liberate us from this deception. We can find it by accepting Jesus, the Son of God, and our Saviour who came to



Christian Neff. Source: GAMEO

redeem us from the authorities of darkness. He desires to make His heavenly kingdom available to us. He wants us to be obedient and fill our lives with His love, so that all our sorrows, troubles and labour may become subordinate to His great purpose. May our lives and efforts, our sayings and doings, reflect ever more the angelic song of praise, "Glory to God in the highest!"

Originating from the heavenly realms is also the great pronouncement, "And peace on earth!" Peace on earth at a time when our whole world is plunged into this terrible war, raging now already for more than a year, and keeping many nations under suspense. For almost two thousand years this message has been proclaimed year after year. It has spread around the world, even to its darkest corners and most remote areas, touching many human

hearts. There is hardly a place where the Good News has not been proclaimed, capturing hearts through its uplifting message, "Peace on earth." Yet, we find ourselves in the midst of this terrible war with its horrible consequences. Fertile fields are being destroyed, cities and villages are in flames, churches and hospitals lie in ruins, innumerable ships are being sunk, and irreplaceable treasures of art and science have been demolished. Millions of promising young men are being massacred daily, and the injured will have to spend the rest of their lives as cripples. Death lies in ambush. Even women commit horrible crimes on their fellow human beings. Ruthless

Roots and Branches

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enemies carry the war into countries where for many years courageous men and women sacrificed their lives in order to proclaim the gospel of peace. They gave up the comforts of their lives so as to help build the kingdom of God here on earth. The fruit of their sacrificial love and labour now is being destroyed through the hate and fury of so-called Christian nations. Despite all of the clamour, the many troubles and horrors of war, the comforting angelic message still resonates: "Peace on earth." The One who was born in Bethlehem longs to bring peace to earth – even in the midst of war, when fear and much suffering and sorrow surround us. This divine peace longs to forgive our sins and fill our lives with love, a love that does not seek its own gratification, but rather desires to please others. Those who allow Jesus to indwell their hearts will be able to convey His peace. He, the Prince of Peace, walks through thousands of military hospitals, heals wounds, comforts those who mourn, and strengthens the hearts of those who cry out for loving care. He is the one who motivates the hearts of many nurses to show love and care to those who need it. Wherever people are willing to open the doors of their hearts, there the Prince of Peace will be happy to enter, fulfilling the third promise, "A peace on whom His favour rests."

God cannot be pleased with humans who are at war with each other and shed each other's blood, nor with those who hate and destroy each other. Selfishness, dishonesty, hypocrisy, injustice, malice and irreconcilable hate are all sinful deeds found in our present world. They can only stir up tempers and contribute to this terrible war. Such human behaviour is detestable to God. Conversely, God's favour rests upon those who follow Jesus, walk in His light, and live a life that reflects the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Wilfried Hein is a member of Bakerview MB Church in Abbotsford, BC. He is the author of the newly released book *A Witness in Times of War and Peace: The story of Gerhard Hein, a Mennonite pastor who served in the Wehrmacht during World War II*. His book also contains an interesting and inspiring Christmas message delivered by his father, Gerhard Hein, during World War II.

Dr. Christian Neff served as a Mennonite pastor at the Weierhof, Palatinate, Germany for fifty-five years. He was a writer, editor and historian, and initiator and leader of the first Mennonite World Conference in Basel, Switzerland in 1925. He also was the co-editor and publisher of the *Mennonitisches Lexikon*. This Christmas message was published in the *Gemeindeblatt der Mennoniten*, No. 1, 72. Jahrgang, January 1, 1941. Since it did not agree with Nazi ideology, it led to a general prohibition of all Mennonite publications (Horst Gerlach, *Bildband zur Geschichte der Mennoniten*, Uelzen-Oldenstadt, Germany, Druck und Verlag Günter Preuschoff, 8).



Girl in Bremerhaven, 1947. *Up from the Rubble*, p. 294

A poem that was printed on the back of
a *Volendam* postcard for passengers headed
to Paraguay.

Trümmer, Schrecken, Flucht und Nacht -
Dann ein Dämmern.
Gott hat alles wohl gemacht!

Lager, Züge, "Volendam" -
Und ein Landen.
Herr, geheiligt ist dein Nam'!

Hütten, Dörfer, Kolonien -
Und Gemeinden.
Gottes Reich soll neu erblühn!

Rubble, terror, flight, night -
And then the dawn,
God has made all things well again!

Camps, trains, Volendam -
And then arrival,
Lord, holy is your name!

Huts, villages, colonies -
And churches,
God's kingdom will bloom again!



On board *Volendam*, *Up from the Rubble*, p. 298