Volume 23 Number 3 September 2017

# Roots and Branches

Periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

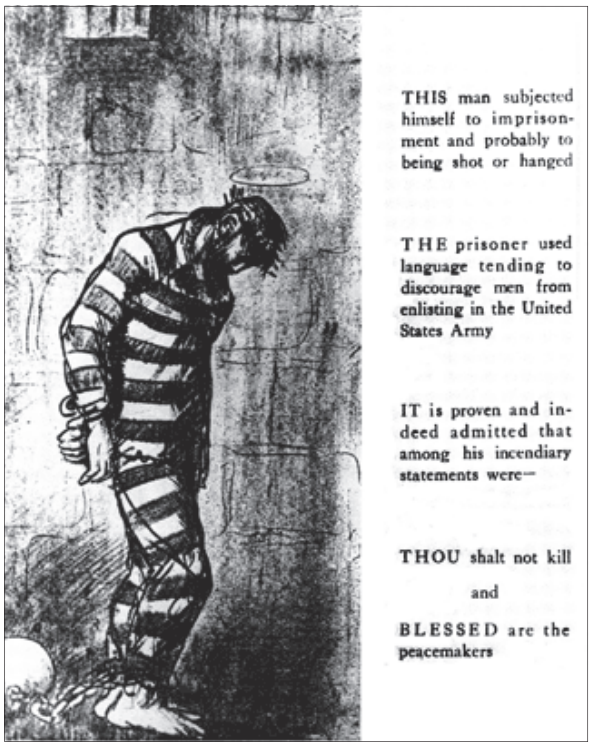
*"What we have heard and known*
*we will tell the next generation."*
Psalm 78

Photo from the exhibit, Volvos of Lebanon, by Scott D. Campbell

**Table of Contents**

# Editorial

By Robert Martens




Source: Blessed are the Peacemakers (1917) by George Bellows. Wikipedia

Mennonites have long defined themselves as a "Peace Church." Thousands of them emigrated from the Russian empire in the 1870s when the right to refuse military service seemed to be under threat. They settled in the Canadian prairies after receiving guarantees that their young men would not be forced into the military. During World War I, a stupendously obtuse conflict that was largely embraced by mainstream North America, Canadian Mennonites were adamant in rejecting conscription into the military.

By the time of the Second World War, Mennonites had softened their stance. Many young Mennonite men, perceiving the fight against Hitler's Third Reich as a "just war," chose to join the military (among these were, of course, numerous medics). In recent decades, Mennonite churches have sometimes hired ministers outside the "peace tradition." One consequence has been that the peace principle barely – or never – rates a mention on Sunday mornings. South of the border, the U.S. Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith has watered down its stance on peace: "As in other Peace Churches many of us choose not to participate in the military, but rather in alternative forms of service."

But perhaps carrying on a debate on this issue is healthy – a monolithic belief can be frighteningly oppressive, as when Mennonite soldiers, returning from combat in World War II, were often shunned by their own congregations. It has also been argued that the concept of nonresistance (*Wehrlosigkeit*: defencelessness) is too passive, that it has opened the door to sexual and emotional abuse by counselling unquestioning obedience: "peace shall destroy many."

In any case, peace-making is now recognized as more than simple rejection of war. Peace and conflict studies programs, such as the one initiated by Mennonite Faith and Learning Society at the University of the Fraser Valley, counsel practical skills and active involvement. In this issue, Gerald Mast points out how Dutch Mennonites avidly assisted their Swiss sisters and brothers in a time of crisis. Other articles recall the Russian Mennonite refugee experience, which has frequently translated into the saving grace of Canadian Mennonite churches coming to the aid of those fleeing the miseries of the Syrian conflict.

In the end, perhaps the Beatitudes, with their achingly beautiful words so long held dear by Anabaptist-Mennonites, say it the best: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

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

## From the MHSBC Office: Please Update Your Contact Details and Membership

If you have changed your email address, please let our office know. We have had a number of emails rebound. If you haven't been receiving emails, please email archives@mhsbc.com to update your contact information. It's easier and more practical than a phone call.

Already an MHSBC member and you wish to volunteer? Complete our membership and volunteer form, which you can find on our website, then email us at archives@mhsbc.com, or call us at 604-853-6177, or visit us in person. And it's now possible to check out photos of current volunteers on our website.

Renew your $35 annual membership in December for the coming year, or purchase a lifetime membership for $750. This is easy to do via our PayPal option on our website at www.mhsbc.com. And while you're renewing your own membership, consider purchasing Gift Subscriptions for family members or friends! The option for gift subscriptions is available through our office by emailing archives@mhsbc.com or by calling 604-853-6177. This makes a wonderful Christmas gift!

All donations will be receipted for tax purposes. However, for reasons of legality, membership fees cannot be receipted.

## "The Last Objectors" film winning awards and attention

By Deborah Froese
November 29, 2016, *The Mennonite,* Reprinted with permission from *The Mennonite* (a publication of Mennonite Church USA) and slightly abbreviated.

A film produced by the Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC) Archives about Conscientious Objectors (COs) is garnering significant attention.

The CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Company) recently aired *The Last Objectors* on its national channel, as well as in Manitoba. The 44-minute documentary won a Silver World Humanitarian award in Jakarta, India. It was also nominated for the Best Feature Documentary at the Views of the World Music & Film Festival in Montreal this summer. The film embodies faith, peace and service in action.

*The Last Objectors* includes interviews with a handful of still-living World War II COs who describe the faith that drove them to refuse arms and the resistance they faced from society for their choice.

"*The Last Objectors* acknowledges these men's experiences as both important and valid," says Korey Dyck, Director, MHC Archives and Gallery. "For some, this is their only chance to tell their story about serving Canada in a peaceful way during the Second World War."

Andrew Wall of Refuge 31 films directed the documentary. Wall says the project came to light through his connection with Conrad Stoesz, MHC archivist, with whom he attended Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC, now Canadian Mennonite University). Stoesz is a passionate supporter of conscientious objection and the energy behind www.alternativeservice.ca, a website exploring how COs found ways to serve their country. His success in securing grants for *The Last Objectors* helped see the project to fruition.

The unique perspective of those who chose not to go to war captured Wall's attention. "The COs, like the veterans of the Second World War, are fading away. Unlike the veterans, their stories haven't been all that well recorded … it was a story worth telling."

*The Last Objectors* is the second of two parts in The CO Project. The film was produced in association with the CBC, MTS Stories From Home, and the support of Heritage Canada through the World Wars Commemoration Fund.

*Deborah Froese connects with leadership, staff, Witness workers and congregations to share stories about the work we do together as the wider church. She sees potential in words to build relationships and understanding. In her spare time, she serves on the editorial committee for the newsletter of her home congregation and writes fiction. She also enjoys photography and other forms of art.* www.mennonitechurch.ca

## Upcoming Events

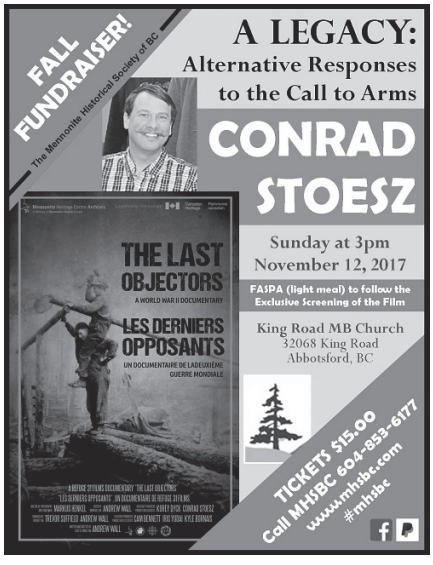
**Rudy Wiebe - Where the Truth Lies: Exploring the Nature of Fact and Fiction**
**And other authors, poets, and illustrators**
Friday, October 27 from 7pm; Saturday, October 28 from 9am to 5:30pm; Saturday evening lecture by Rudy Wiebe at 7pm. Complete weekend is $40 in advance, $35 for students/senior in advance, or $50 at the door. The Saturday lecture only is $10. For tickets, call MHM at 604-758-5667 or Judson Lake House at 604-854-3387. Location to be determined,

**Annual MHSBC Genealogy Workshop**
Friday, November 3, at 7pm
Saturday, November 4, from 9am to 4pm.
If you are a novice, expert genealogist, or somewhere in between, be sure to mark your calendar. On Friday, Tim Janzen will conduct a seminar on DNA. The following day, a series of workshops on genealogy will be offered. Cost for Friday alone is $20 per person; for Saturday only is $40; for the entire weekend, a bargain at $50. Pre-registration is required. Contact the MHSBC for tickets. Mennonite Heritage Museum, 1818 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford, BC.

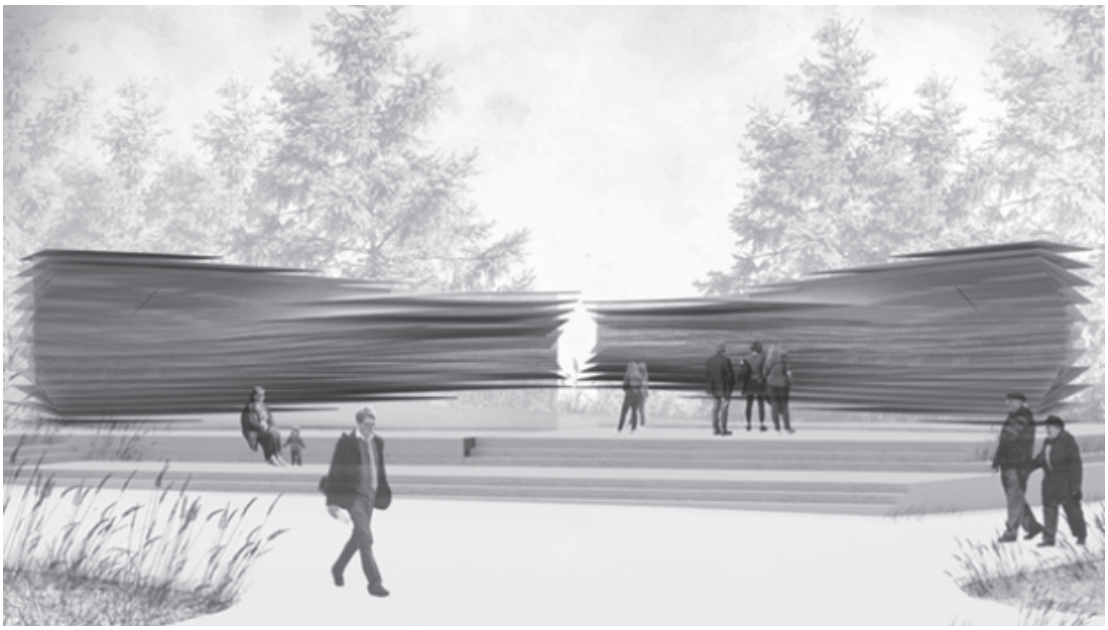
**MHSBC Annual Fall Fundraiser**

### A Legacy: Alternative Responses to the Call the Arms

Sunday, November 12 at 3pm
Our annual fundraising event will feature the award-winning film, *The Last Objectors: A World War II Documentary*. The film producer, Conrad Stoesz will speak and answer questions. Faspa (a light meal) to follow. Tickets are only $15 through MHSBC. Call 604-853-6177. ww.mhsbc.com King Road MB Church, 32068 King Road, Abbotsford.



# Memorial to the Victims of Communism: Final Design Chosen



In the February 2017 issue of Roots and Branches, Ruth Derksen Siemens reported that a national committee had been commissioned to choose a design for a memorial to the victims of Communism. Five designs for the memorial were considered by that committee, of which Ruth was a member. The winning design was announced earlier this year.

By Dylan C. Robertson
May 17, 2017,*Vancouver Metro*
www.metronews.ca

The federal government has selected the design for the Memorial to the Victims of Communism, which they hope to unveil by November 2018. The winner, called Arc of Memory, is an abstract bronze sculpture that reflects light in different ways based on sunlight.

"It remembers victims of oppression, but expresses hope," lead artist Paul Raff told reporters Wednesday morning. "It invites fascination and exploration."

The sculpture consists of two curved wall-like metal frames that span 21 metres and rise about four metres in height. They hold more than 4,000 bronze rods along 365 steel fins, meaning the sun shines at a unique fold in the sculpture daily, reaching the middle at the winter solstice. That's an intended metaphor, as it's the darkest day of the year, Raff said. "Every moment in this vast history is made visible and tangible."

In early March, the government announced five proposals and 717 people completed a survey, with results splitting close among the proposals. Arc of Memory was rated highest for being "visually striking" and conveying "hope and freedom," but the lowest for expressing "suffering and loss." Heritage Minister Joly hand-selected the design after input from a jury.

Another proposal that would show a Vladimir Lenin statue being toppled, a symbol of countries rejecting communism, gained the most media attention, but upset some diaspora groups, according to Andris Ķesteris of the Latvian National Federation in Canada. "It would work counter to the concept of freedom, actually putting up these oppressors," said Ķesteris, comparing it to a statue of a falling Hitler.

The Tribute to Liberty charity has raised $1 million for the project, which should cost about $3 million. The government said it will match donations up to $1.5 million, and has already allocated $500,000 for construction costs. The memorial will carry the name "Canada, a Land of Refuge" and it will be built on the west side of the Garden of the Provinces and Territories, a seldom-used park near the Portage Bridge, where condos are being built.

The memorial has been talked about since 2008; the former Conservative government controversially planned its site in front of the Supreme Court, which judges rejected. Czech Ambassador Pavel Hrnčíř told Metro he hopes this projects goes over better with Ottawans.

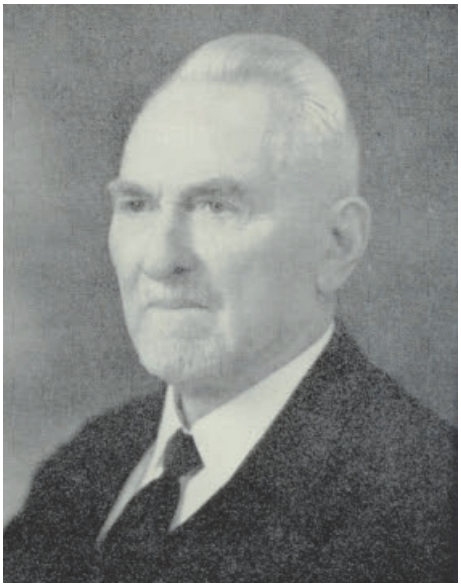
"We're very happy to see this project realized," he said.

**From the Archives: *Wichtige Dokumente* – Important Documents**

# Conscientious Objectors in WWI and The Canadian Government

Introduced and translated by Robert Martens

The year was 1917 and the world was in turmoil. World War I, "the war to end all wars," dragged on – endlessly – in Europe. In Russia, Mennonites were about to face revolution and, eventually, a totalitarian state. The situation in Canada was far more peaceful, but German-speaking Mennonites were facing hostility from the patriotic mainstream. The *Kanadier* Mennonites, who had emigrated to Canada in the 1870s, were worried that they would be called upon to send their sons to war – despite the freedom from military service guaranteed them when they first arrived.



Benjamin Ewert. Source: GAMEO

They had reason to be concerned. Historian Frank Epp cites some hostile press clippings. "The *Free Press* referred to Mennonites as 'dirty shirkers … without doubt no asset to any country.' An editorial writer in *Saturday Night* found 'little, if anything, to recommend them.' Mennonites, it was said, were a colonized and communal tribe living and trading among themselves and 'retaining undisturbed all their antiquated propensities, most of which are out of harmony with the customs and aspirations of their country'" (401).

Mennonites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan decided it was time for action. Though habitually in conflict – the "Mennonite sickness" – prairie Mennonites joined forces long enough to elect five delegates who would travel to Ottawa and petition the government for assurances that their young men would not be forced into military service. The five selected were a motley bunch. Among them was David Toews, who would achieve long-lasting prominence as the head of the Canadian Board of Colonization. His work would be crucial in bringing over 20,000 Russian Mennonite refugees to Canada. In contrast, delegate Klaas Peters was a Mennonite only in name. Peters was at different times a minister, land agent, hotel owner, historian – and leader of a New Church of Jerusalem group inspired by Lutheran mystic Immanuel Swedenborg. Peters was under police investigation and eventually would end up in court where his Mennonite credentials were questioned. Frank Epp writes that "Mennonite leaders had allowed him to go with them to Ottawa because he knew his way around and he in turn had found the Mennonite connection useful when it came to keeping young men out of the war" (403).

A third member of the delegation, Heinrich Doerksen, was a minister in the Chortitza Mennonite Church. A fourth, Abraham Doerksen, was involved in a church conflict that saw him become an elder in the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church. He would emigrate along with thousands of traditionalist Mennonites to Mexico in 1922.

On the more "progressive" wing of the delegation was the capable and educated Benjamin Ewert, a minister in the General Conference Mennonite Church. After studying at schools in the United States and Canada, Ewert briefly taught in Gretna, Manitoba before beginning a lengthy career as itinerant minister. He served on various boards of the General Conference, organized churches in Saskatchewan, opened and supervised the Bethel Mennonite Mission in Winnipeg, and served as administrator at the Bergthal Mennonite Old Folk's Home in Gretna. Ewert also owned a bookstore and operated a printing press in Gretna.

It was at his printing press that Ewert published "*Wichtige Dokumente betreffs der Wehrfreiheit der Mennoniten in Canada*" (Important Documents Concerning Freedom from Military Service for Mennonites in Canada), a 16-page booklet containing articles, speeches and documents that focused on the right of Canadian Mennonites not to bear arms. The booklet includes:

1. a report, 1872, by John J. McGee, Secretary of the Interior, that speaks favourably to the rights of immigrating Russian Mennonites. The report also appears in German translation.
2. a report, 1873, by John Lowe, Secretary of Agriculture, that explicitly spells out guaranteed privileges for immigrating Mennonites. It appears both in English and in German translation.

3. the welcoming speech to Mennonite immigrants by Governor-General Lord Dufferin, 1877. German translation is included.
4. a German-language petition regarding military service by Canadian Mennonites to the government in Ottawa, 1917. Also appears in English translation.
5. the response in writing by R. B. Bennett (later to be prime minister) to the petition, 1917. A German translation is included.
6. a German-only document written by Mennonites as a response to Lord Dufferin's speech of welcome, 1877. It speaks to the difficulties of emigrating to Europe and to the gratitude of Russian Mennonite immigrants for the open arms policy of the Canadian government. The document uses the term, *Eure Hoheit*, Your Highness, in addressing the governor-general.
7. Finally, a German-only article telling the story of the five-man delegation to Ottawa. This was written by Benjamin Ewert in 1917. A translation follows.

*"Wichtige Dokumente" can be accessed at the office of Mennonite Historical Society of BC.*

Conscientious objectors at work building roads.
Photo: www.alternativeservice.ca

## Report regarding the military issue from the delegation sent to Ottawa in January 1917

The great European war that broke out in August 1914 and in which Canada participated has prompted Mennonites in western Canada to be concerned whether, in the end, the situation might cause some unpleasantness – or indeed that Mennonites might be forced to take part in the conflict. When in December 1916 we became aware that the government would be sending out so-called Registration Cards containing 24 questions that must be answered, our concern became even greater and more widespread. The burning question was asked: is this the beginning of compulsory military service? Out of fear that this might be the case, in many instances the decision was made not to fill out the Cards.

Then the idea was hatched to send a delegation to Ottawa to discuss this issue with the government face-to-face. The first step was taken in Herbert, Saskatchewan, where a gathering of representative Mennonites from that area resolved to send a delegation to Ottawa, and to issue an invitation to other church circles in Saskatchewan and Manitoba to join this delegation. The resolution was passed. Subsequently, a similar gathering was called in Waldheim, Saskatchewan, in which it was unanimously decided to send a representative to Ottawa. Teacher and elder David Töws was then selected as Rosthern's delegate. The district of Herbert sent Klaas Peters as its representative.

Shortly before the new year (December 28), a similar assembly met in Altona, Manitoba. It consisted of the leaders of all the Mennonite churches [*Gemeinden*] in Manitoba (except for the so-called Old Colony, whose branch congregations in Saskatchewan also did not take part), who found themselves completely in agreement with their brothers and sisters [*Geschwister*] in Saskatchewan. At this gathering, three delegates were elected: Elder Abraham Dörksen from Sommerfeld, Minister Heinrich Dörksen from near Niverville, and Benjamin Ewert from Gretna.

Such unified action from the various Mennonite churches from Saskatchewan and Manitoba had not previously occurred, and until recently it was not even thought possible. Our common principle of nonresistance, as well as the fear that military service would become compulsory, made this all possible. It is exceptionally encouraging that this came about. May God grant that all the churches that have found common cause might now find themselves increasingly united and work together to accomplish the various tasks in the Kingdom of God.

On Tuesday, January 2, 1917, we five elected delegates set out on our journey, arriving healthy and happy in Ottawa on Friday, January 5. Because several government ministers were currently out of town, we had to spend several days in Ottawa. This presented us with the opportunity to discuss our case and plan how best to present our petition. On Saturday, January 6 we requested information as to whom we should approach and when we might communicate our concerns. It was arranged that we would appear in person in the Department of Minister Robert Rogers on Monday morning between 8 and noon; and that other men from the Ministry would also be present. We expressed our wish to meet instead with Prime Minister Robert Borden. We were told that Mr. Borden was so overwhelmingly busy that our wish could not be granted; and besides, that it made no difference with which government representative we would meet.

Monday, January 8 was therefore a significant day for us. At the appointed hour, we went to the building in which Minister Rogers' Department is located. Present were Minister Robert Rogers; Colonel Hugh Clark, under-secretary for the Ministry of Internal Affairs; and R. B. Bennett, member of parliament from Alberta and also director-general of the Department of National Service. Several other men, expected to be present, were absent.

We were greeted in the friendliest possible way by the gentlemen and we chatted casually for several minutes. Mr. Rogers then asked about our concerns. Brother David Töws, whom we had chosen to be our spokesperson, first of all handed over the document that affirmed the official nature of our delegation and summarized the purpose of our coming. After Mr. Rogers had read this, Brother Töws stood up and read our memorandum. (This document appears elsewhere in this book, and doesn't need to be described further here.) Minister Rogers then took the floor. He spoke of the current war and of its necessity; of his hopes for a complete victory for the allies; of Mennonites as an agricultural people; of agriculture as a national service, that the soldiers in battle would be of no value and could not achieve victory without adequate food supplies. He recommended that Mennonites should continue their agricultural labours, work harder than ever, raise large crops. The *Privilegium* bestowed on Mennonites upon their immigration was still completely valid and would be respected by the government. We would not be forced into military service.

Mr. Bennett spoke about the Registration Cards. They must absolutely be filled out. They presented no danger at all to us; they would not obligate us to military service. The purpose of the Cards is to obtain information on the population: the number of those who work in agriculture; the number of those who could do alternative work, etc. Mr. Bennett also confirmed repeatedly that Mennonites would not be forced into military service: first, because they are an agricultural people and in that sense essential also during times of war; secondly, because the government respects their religious views on participation in warfare; and third, because they had received a *Privilegium* from the government, and that would be respected by the authorities both currently and in the future so long as Canada flies the British flag.

However, if the allies would not achieve victory [said Bennett], then in all likelihood the freedom we Mennonites have enjoyed in Canada would be extinguished. Canada would treat our *Privilegium* as no more than a worthless scrap of paper, much as the Germans have treated the agreement of neutrality that they signed with Belgium. As for the Registration Cards, Mr. Bennet recommended that Mennonites write the word "Mennonite" crosswise or in the margins of the section containing the questions, so that the authorities would know with whom they are dealing.

We then inquired if it might be possible that young people from our community who had allowed themselves to be provoked into military service could now be released. The answer was yes. They must, however, make their decision to request release independently, and must submit their decision in writing to the battalion commander. Their request should be forwarded to Robert Rogers in Ottawa to assure that it be granted. This would, however, apply only to those still stationed in Canada; those who have already shipped overseas are no longer under the jurisdiction of the government.

We then inquired further on whom the government regards as Mennonite – only those who belong to a church or also those who have not yet been baptized? The answer was: not only church members but the children of Mennonites as well. Those who have entered into another church denomination, though, would not be regarded as Mennonites.

Our final request was for written confirmation of what had been said. That was readily granted.

Our meeting lasted exactly one hour. We parted from the gentlemen with hearty handshakes, thanking them for their friendship and sincere good will, and left with joyous and grateful hearts. We were convinced that our merciful God had blessed our trip and had heard the

prayers of our brothers and sisters.

We began the return journey on Monday evening, making a side trip out of Toronto to see that wonder of nature, Niagara Falls. Travelling through Detroit, Chicago and St. Paul, we arrived home on Saturday, January 13, after being away for twelve days; that is, for those of us from Manitoba – those from Saskatchewan reached home a few days later. Thanks be to God for his watchful protection and for the success of our mission.

*Lord Dufferin's welcoming speech to Mennonite immigrants is astonishing in its use of metaphors: agriculture is described as a war on the land. He served as Canadian governor-general from 1872 to 1878, and was involved in the resignation of Prime Minister John A. Macdonald after the so-called Pacific Scandal. Dufferin was a talented individual, seemingly born to diplomacy. After his stint in Canada, he served in Russia, Turkey and India. Though a gifted diplomat, Dufferin did not know his way around money, and crashed financially after being involved with a British con artist; his own moral standing, however, was never in question. Dufferin's later life was marked by tragedy: his son was killed in the Boer War.*

## Lord Dufferin's Speech of Welcome to the First Mennonite Settlers in Manitoba, Aug. 21, 1877

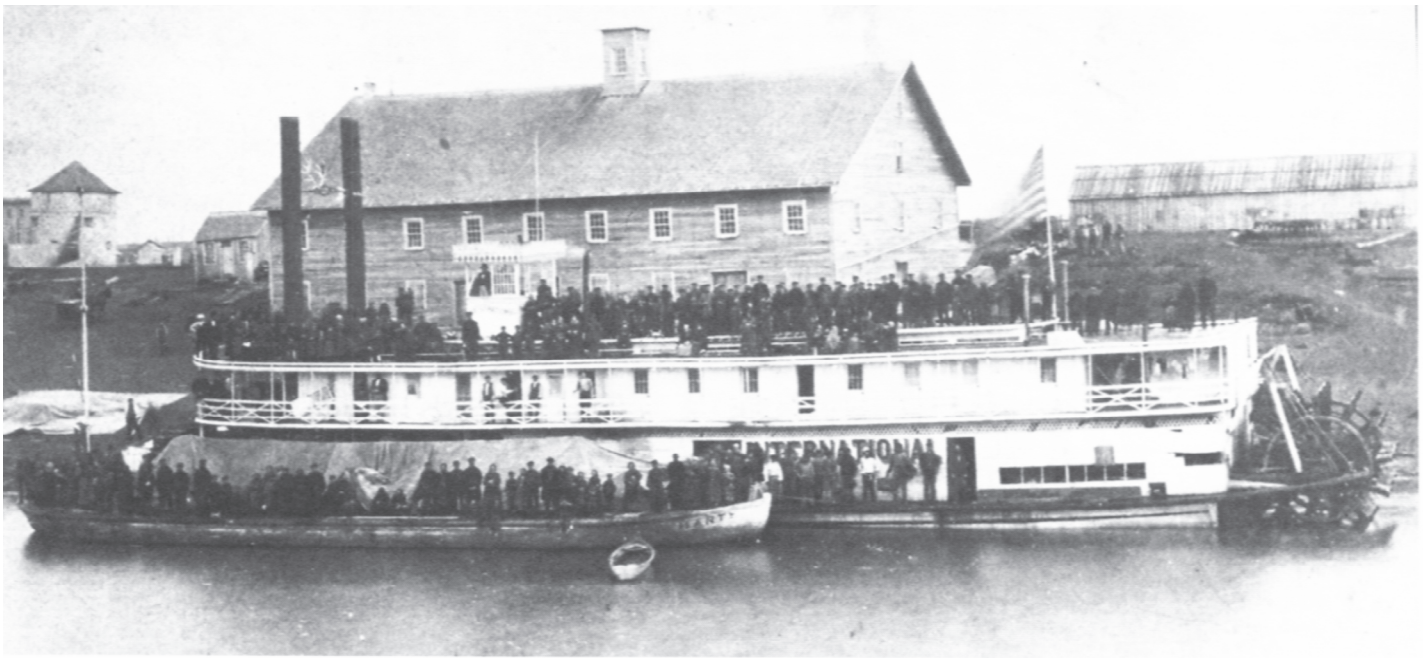
Fellow-Citizens of the Dominion and Fellow-Subjects of Her Majesty, – I have come here today in the name of the Queen of England to bid you welcome to Canadian soil. With this welcome it is needless that I should couple the best wishes of the Imperial Government in England or of the Dominion Government at Ottawa, for you are well aware that both have regarded your coming here with unmitigated satisfaction.

You have left your own land in obedience to a conscientious scruple, nor will you have been the first to cross the Atlantic under the pressure of a similar exigency. In doing so you must have made great sacrifices, broken with many tender associations, and over thrown the settled purposes of your former peacefully ordered lives; but the very fact of your having manfully faced the uncertainties and risks of so distant an emigration rather than surrender your religious convictions in regard to the unlawfulness of warfare, proves you to be well worthy of our respect, confidence, and esteem.

You have come to a land where you will find the people with whom you are to associate engaged indeed in a great struggle and contending with foes whom it requires their best energies to encounter, but those foes are not your fellowmen, nor will you be called upon in the struggle to stain your hands with human blood – a task which is so abhorrent to your religious feelings. The war to which we invite you as recruits and comrades is a war waged against the brute forces of nature; but those forces will welcome our domination, and reward our attack by placing their treasures at our disposal. It is a war of ambition, – for we wish to annex territory after territory – but neither blazing villages nor devastated fields will mark our ruthless track; our battalions will march across the illimitable plains which stretch before us as sunshine steals athwart the ocean; the rolling prairie will blossom in our wake, and corn and peace and plenty will spring where we have trod.

But not only are we ourselves engaged in these beneficient occupations – you will find that the only other nationality with whom we can ever come into contact are occupied with similar peaceful pursuits. They, like us are engaged in advancing the standards of civilization westwards, not as rivals, but as allies; and a community of interests, objects, and aspirations has already begun to cement between the people of the United States and ourselves what is destined, I trust, to prove an indissoluble affection. If, then, you have come hither to seek for peace – peace at last we can promise you.

But it is not merely to the material blessings of our land that I bid you welcome. We desire you to share with us on equal terms our constitutional liberties, our municipal privileges, and our domestic freedom; we invite you to assist us in choosing the members of our Parliament, in shaping our laws, and in moulding our future destinies. There is no right or function which we exercise as free citizens in which we do not desire that you should participate, and with this civil freedom we equally gladly offer you absolute religious liberty. The forms of worship you have brought with you, you will be able to practise in the most unrestricted manner, and we confidently trust that those blessings which have waited upon your virtuous exertions in your Russian homes will continue to attend you here; for we hear that you are a sober-minded and God-fearing community, and as such you are the doubly welcome amongst us. It is with the greatest pleasure that I have passed through your villages, and witnessed your comfortable homesteads, barns and byres, which have arisen like magic upon this fertile plain, for they prove indisputably that you are expert in



"The steamboat 'International' and barge 'Harty' arrive at Fort Garry with 380 Mennonite colonists, the first such group to arrive in Manitoba, 1874." Source: Archives of Manitoba, Transportation-Boat-International 1. N13944.

agriculture, and already possess a high standard of domestic comfort.

In the name then, of Canada and her people, in the name of queen Victoria and her empire, I again stretch out my hand to you, the hand of brotherhood and good fellowship, for you are as welcome to our affection as you are to our lands, liberties and freedom. In the eyes of our law the least among you is equal to the highest magnate in our land, and the proudest of our citizens may well be content to hail you as his fellow countryman. You will find Canada a beneficient and loving mother, and under her fostering care I trust your community is destined to flourish and extend in wealth and numbers through countless generations. In one word, beneath the flag whose folds now wave above you, you will find protection, peace, civil and religious liberty, constitutional freedom and equal laws.

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***From MHSBC volunteer, board member, and genealogist Cheryl Isaac:***

*I'm looking for a picture of my 3rd great grandmother Sara Sawatzky (1816-1894) wife of Jakob Abraham Isaac (1813-1881). Here is a picture of Jakob. Thank you so very much.*

# S.S. Samaria

*This is the second in a series of articles on Mennonite immigrant ships.*

By Louise Bergen Price

A story my father once told me about our trip to Canada in 1948 on the *S.S. Samaria* makes me smile. Two young men lean against the ship's rail, enjoying a break from the stormy weather. One of them flicks his cigarette into the Atlantic, watching it arc high above the water. "Someday," he says, "I'll write an article to *Der Bote* about how we sat on the deck of the *Samaria*, drinking beer and smoking."

He's not joking – or, at least, I don't think he is. There's so much he doesn't know about the Mennonite community in Canada, and he'll soon learn that both of these indulgences, as well as going to the movies and dancing, are on the forbidden list. But that's all to come.

For my father, Hein Bergen, and the other refugees travelling with him, the *Samaria* offers a breathing space between the hardships of the past and fear of the unknown. Although the future is scary, it's surely better than what he's left behind. He's had no childhood. As a young boy, he's begged from door to door to keep his family alive. School was a sporadic affair. When he was 16, his father was disappeared. He was 20 when the Germans invaded. Sent to the Caucasus with Operation Todt, he clambered up telephone poles to repair bombed-out lines in the bitter cold. He dodged guerrilla bullets in Yugoslavia and Italy. Captured by the British, he and his friends slaughtered a horse and cooked soup with horse meat and stinging nettle to keep from starving.

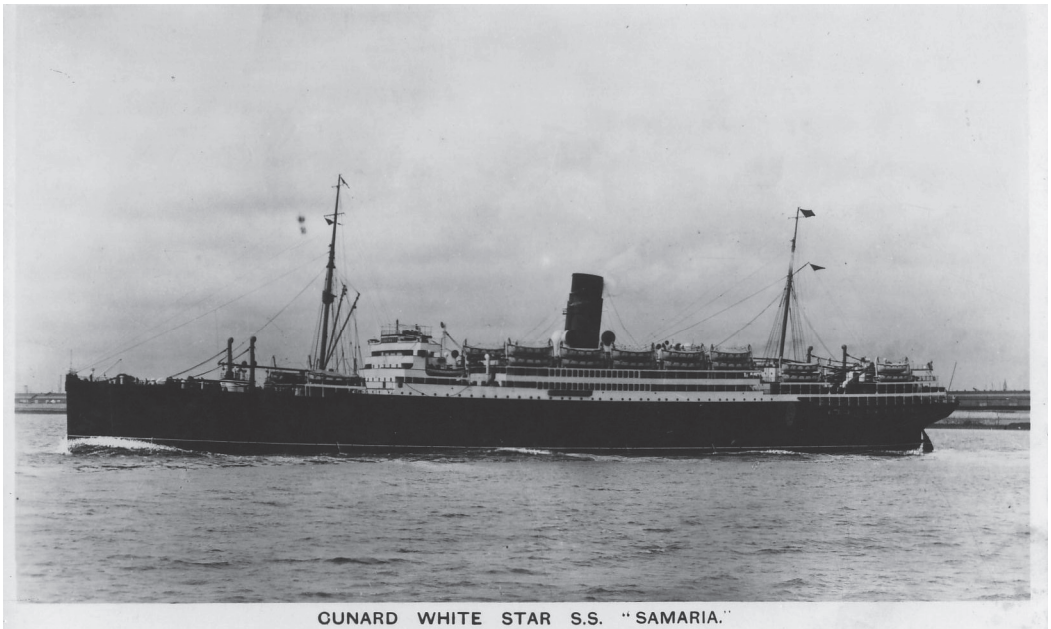
My father, at 27, has no idea where his family is, or whether his parents or siblings are alive. But he has a wife and baby daughter below deck – his own small family. This ship, the aging troop carrier *Samaria*, is making his new start in life possible. He is immensely grateful to her.

The *S.S. Samaria* was a steamship built for the Cunard Line in 1920 to replace ships lost in World War I. She was 190 metres long with a speed capability of 16 knots (30 km/hour) and, in the early years of her service, was used extensively for cruising, carrying up to 2,000 passengers and over 400 crew. She was equipped with the latest technology: electric light, wireless, refrigeration machinery, and submarine signalling devices.

In September 1940, on a trip between Liverpool and New York, her passengers included a number of British children being evacuated through the Children's Overseas Reception Board (CORB). Enemy submarines prowled the seas, but the *Samaria* arrived safely on October 3. Other ships were not as fortunate. While the *Samaria* was underway, it was announced that the *City of Benares* had been torpedoed with 90 children aboard. Although many of the passengers were rescued, 77 of the children died, and the CORB program came to an end.

In 1941, the *Samaria* was overhauled to be used as a troop carrier for the Royal Navy on the route from Liverpool to Suez. During her war service, she carried more than 20,000 servicemen and steamed 250,000 miles.

Transport was at a premium after the war, and the *Samaria* was kept busy carrying soldiers and their families back to Canada. It wasn't until September 1948 that she was free to carry displaced persons. On September 23, she made her first refugee run from Cuxhaven, Ger-



CUNARD WHITE STAR S.S. "SAMARIA."

Source: Bergen Family Collection

many to Quebec City, Canada, arriving on October 3. According to Pier 21 records, she was carrying 1,621 passengers. MCC had secured passage for a small group of Mennonites. My parents were part of that group, as well as my mother's siblings and her mother.

In 1951, *Samaria* was refitted to carry regular passengers, but the demand for steamship travel was dwindling with the advent of lower priced airline fares. By 1955, the company felt that it was no longer profitable to run the *Samaria* and she was sent to the scrapyard in Inverkeithing, Firth of Forth, Scotland.

But the old steamship still holds a place of honour in my mother's album. I don't remember the passage – I was only 1 year old – but a photo places me on board, squinting uncertainly at the camera, my mom's hand at the ready in case I slip. To my left, a small cluster of women. Behind me, through the ship's rail, the Atlantic. Waiting for us all, Canada.

My father, far right, with Mom's family just prior to boarding. L-R Jake Sawatzky, Katie Sawatzky, Justine Sawatzky holding Louise Bergen, John Sawatzky, Irene (Sawatzky) Bergen, Heinrich Bergen.
Source: Bergen Family Collection

More about the Samaria here:

"Cunard RMS Samaria." www.richcblog.blogspot.ca/2005/03/cunard-rms-samaria.html

"The Immigrant Ships." www.thecanadasite.com/history/history5b_scythia.html

"RMS Samaria." www.de.wikipedia.org/wiki/RMS_Samaria

"RMS Samaria." www.greatships.net/samaria2.html

"Ship Arrival Database." www.pier21.ca/research/immigration-records/ship-arrival-search

Louise Bergen Price as a toddler aboard the *S.S. Samaria*.
Source: Bergen Family Collection

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## When Anabaptists Were Refugees

By Gerald J. Mast

On July 13, 1711, Christian Stutzman and Magdalena Stucki left their home in Bern, Switzerland to travel north down the Rhine River on a boat headed for the Netherlands. Christian was a 34-year-old farmer and member of the Reformed Church whose 37-year old wife, Magdalena, had been baptized into an Amish congregation. Because of Magdalena's membership in an Anabaptist church, they were being deported by the Bern authorities, along with nearly 350 other Amish and Reistian Swiss Brethren from Bern who left their villages and farms behind to become refugees looking for a safe home across the border.

The refugees on the boats going north carried names such as Eberly, Gerber, Habegger, Jost, Kropf, Meyer, Miller, Moser, Reesor, Raber, Roth, Rupp, Schirch, Schmid, Schlabach, Schwartzentruber, Sommer, Stucki, Stutzman, Wenger, to list just a few. These Swiss refugees found hospitality in Dutch Mennonite communities that had advocated on their behalf with both Dutch and Swiss authorities. Fifty years later, Christian Stutzman appeared in the records as an Amish minister in the congregation at Kampen. Some of the descendants of these refugees, like those of Christian and Magdalena, eventually ended up in North America.

The details of this deportation and the many decades of harassment and persecution endured by Swiss Anabaptists in the 1600s and 1700s are found in two volumes of source documents from the Stadtsarchief Amsterdam, newly transcribed and translated by James Lowry and published by the Ohio Amish Library under the title *Documents of Brotherly Love*, vols. I and II. These letters and transcripts provide evidence for the persistent and costly work of the Committee for Foreign Needs formed by various Dutch Mennonite groups to provide legal, political, and monetary assistance to persecuted Swiss Anabaptists in Zurich and Bern. For example, in 1671, the Swiss authorities deported around 700 Anabaptists to the Palatinate [a historical territory of the Holy Roman Empire, originally a palatinate administered by a count palatine], punishing those who returned back over the border illegally by imprisoning them and/or branding them with a hot iron. Frustrated by the number of returning refugees, the authorities eventually sold some of them as slaves to row on galley ships. The Dutch Mennonites intervened by advocating on behalf of the refugees, providing money and other assistance for resettlement in the Palatinate, and sending delegations to visit the refugees to check on their well-being.

Why were these Anabaptist farmers so despised by the Bernese authorities that they were uprooted from their homes, many of them imprisoned, and eventually sent north? One reason is that the Swiss Anabaptists were stubborn nonconformists who declined to participate in the official civic Christianity of Switzerland. They refused to swear oaths of allegiance and they were unwilling to take up arms in defense of their homeland. They also disobeyed the numerous mandates against them, often returning illegally to their land and families after being expelled by the authorities.

...a band of Anabaptists led by a former Münsterite named Jan van Batenburg sought to destabilize the social order by plundering churches and monasteries.

More broadly, many of their neighbors and some of the civil authorities regarded the Anabaptists as both a religious and a security threat. Repeatedly, the Swiss authorities identified the Swiss Brethren with the violent Anabaptists at Münster who abolished private property and established polygamy in 1534-35, as well as with Anabaptists who had participated in the German Peasants Revolt of 1525 led by Thomas Müntzer. Johannes Ludwig Runckel, the Dutch ambassador to Switzerland who was given authority to negotiate with Bern authorities about their Anabaptist issues, lamented in a letter to the Committee for Foreign Needs that "most government officials here do not know what the characteristics of the Mennonites actually are, nor know what kind of distinction to make between them and the Müntzerite and Münsterite Anabaptists. Rather, they blindly believe as gospel all which the opponents and persecutors of the Mennonites charge them with."

Runckel's presence in Bern as a negotiator on behalf of the Amish and Reistian Swiss Brethren was due in part to the political advocacy work of the Dutch Mennonites, who had come to see these Swiss dissenters as their brothers and sisters in faith, even though Swiss Anabaptism originated in a different milieu than did Dutch Anabaptism. Of course, the Dutch Mennonites also remembered a time when their churches were branded with being "Münsterites" and subject to mandates and harassment. For years following the end of the Münster regime, a band of Anabaptists led by a former Münsterite named Jan van Batenburg sought to destabilize the social

order by plundering churches and monasteries. Memories of the Münster regime and Batenburger crimes plagued Anabaptist communities who struggled to distinguish their peaceful churches from Münster and its aftermath.

We should acknowledge, to be sure, that the story of the Mennonites is indeed connected to the story of Münster. For example, the *Martyrs Mirror* includes the story of the songwriter Anna Janz, who converted from the revolutionary Anabaptism of Münster to the spiritualist nonresistance of David Joris before she was captured, imprisoned, and executed. Anna left behind an influential and eloquent letter to her son Isaiah, explaining her apocalyptic, yet peaceful, faith convictions.

Menno Simons, like numerous other peaceful Anabaptist leaders, had personal connections to Münsterite leaders. He was baptized and ordained by Obbe Philips, who had been baptized and ordained by Münsterite missioners. Scholars think it likely that Menno's younger brother Peter was part of a band of armed Anabaptists who occupied the Oldeklooster monastery in April of 1535 and were defeated after a battle in which Peter was killed. When Menno left the Catholic church that year to join the Anabaptist movement, he was joining a discredited radical conventicle that was regarded as a threat not just to orthodox Christianity but also to the social order itself. Menno devoted much of his pastoral work and writing to distinguishing peaceful Anabaptism from militant Anabaptism and to building a network of congregations that displayed the peace and holiness of the New Jerusalem in their life together.

Münster cages, Münster, Germany.
Photo: Rüdiger Wölk, Wikipedia

But Menno did not live to see tolerance of Anabaptist churches in the Low Countries and Northern Germany where he ministered. He and his family lived on the run as fugitives and refugees from civil authorities who never managed to apprehend him, even though they placed a price on his head of 100 guilders. As late as 1554, the city council of Wismar – where Menno had lived for a time – voted to expel Anabaptists from the city.

By the time Dutch Mennonites formed a relief committee to assist the beleaguered and persecuted Swiss Anabaptists in the late 1600s, Dutch Anabaptism had experienced a century of toleration and growing affluence. But because of books like the *Martyrs Mirror*, they remembered their heritage as a people on the run – ready to "flee for the Lord's sake from one city or country into another, and suffer the spoiling of our goods," as the 1632 Dordrecht Confession of Faith puts it in article 14. This memory of a refugee past strengthened their solidarity with Swiss Anabaptists who were threatened with deportation and imprisonment.

The actions taken by the Dutch Mennonites in support of Swiss Anabaptist refugees can inspire our actions today on behalf of people on the run because of religious or political persecution or because of war. Because our faith ancestors were often wrongly associated with the violence of extremists in their faith communities, we should be sympathetic to those of our neighbors who are falsely blamed for the violence of their co-religionists. Because our faith ancestors often broke the law in order to stay connected with their families and property, we should find solidarity with undocumented people who cross borders illegally for the sake of personal survival, financial needs, or family relationships. Moreover, we can be inspired by the work of the Committee on Foreign Needs in at least five areas.

1. Advocacy. The Committee on Foreign Needs lobbied the States General of the Netherlands and Dutch Re-

formed Church leaders to intervene with their counterparts in Zurich and Bern on behalf of the persecuted Swiss Anabaptists. An outcome of this lobbying was that the States General authorized their ambassador Johannes Ludwig Runckel to look after the interests of the Swiss Anabaptists and to negotiate on their behalf. Without this advocacy, many Swiss Anabaptists would no doubt have been left to rot in prison, and most of them would have been forced to give up their assets when they migrated.

Source: Pinterest

2. Cooperation. Dutch Mennonite groups who were confessionally and culturally divided from one another worked together to support the Swiss Anabaptists in their time of trouble and dislocation. Congregations who worked together on refugee relief ranged from the very conservative Groningen Old Flemish to the liberal Waterlanders and included both Zonist and Lamist congregations [of Amsterdam].

3. Money. The Committee on Foreign Needs raised more than half a million guilders from Dutch Mennonite congregations over the course of fifty years to support Swiss Anabaptist refugees. This amounts to millions in today's American dollars (likely around $5 million), a substantial financial commitment of concrete care and support.

4. Hospitality. Urban and suburban Dutch Mennonite professionals opened their homes to rural Swiss Anabaptist farmers and artisans who spoke a different language and who expressed a simpler piety. The Swiss often stayed in Dutch homes for months until a suitable plan for longer-term residence was found.

5. Resettlement. The Committee on Foreign Needs investigated many options for resettling the Swiss refugees, including negotiating with the King of Prussia for a possible settlement there. In the end, most of the refugees ended up finding homes in or near Dutch cities like Deventer, Kampen, Sappemeer, and Groningen. The Committee helped the refugees to purchase houses and farms and to become established in their occupations. Although at first the Swiss worshiped in separate congregations, they eventually assimilated into various Dutch Mennonite groups, and some migrated to North America with the assistance of the Committee. Among those who came to Pennsylvania were descendants of Christian Stutzman and Magdalena Stucki.

In a 1708 letter urging organized support of the persecuted Swiss Anabaptists, Jan Freriksz from Deventer described the conditions that led Christian leaders to attack Anabaptist communities in Switzerland, threatening them with prison, deportation, and galley slavery. He wrote that "as long as there are followers of hatred and as long as there is hatred, especially that which originates in pseudo-religion, there will be persecution: one time less, another time more." Freriksz cited a proverb: "Theological hatred is satanic hatred." The causes of persecution have not disappeared, nor have the needs of persecuted refugees who require the advocacy and generosity of the church.

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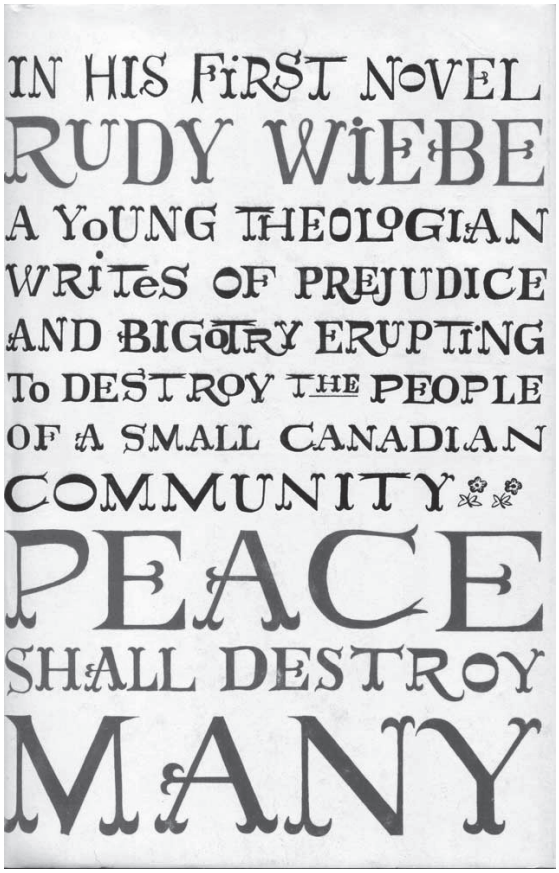
# Re-framing the Reaction to *Peace Shall Destroy Many*: Rudy Wiebe, Delbert Wiens, and the Mennonite Brethren

*The following is an extract from an article published in* Mennonite Quarterly Review *90 (Jan. 2016) 73-102. Footnotes have been somewhat condensed in the interest of brevity. The complete article can be accessed either in MQR 90 or in the MHSBC library. In Paul Tiessen's words: "The essay draws into focus Wiebe's identity as editor of the* Mennonite Brethren Herald *... along with the skirmishes among church leaders and the increasingly prominent and cosmopolitan musicians in the church, and the long-simmering tensions between inward-looking pietistic expression and outward-looking intellectual engagement among Mennonite Brethren during the 1960s ...."*

By Paul Tiessen

*The Dust-Jacket Flap*

That [Rudy] Wiebe had "only a faint idea of what had happened was undoubtedly caused in part by the complicating effects of the novel's dust jacket. Designed by [publisher] McClelland and Stewart without any input from Wiebe, the reductive and sensational rhetoric on the dust jacket attempted, however ineffectively, to communicate the essence and import of the novel to a non-Mennonite readership. The gaudy wording splashed across the entire outside front cover of the jacket, and repeated on the back, read: "In His First Novel / Rudy Wiebe / A Young Theologian / Writes Of Prejudice / And Bigotry Erupting / To Destroy The People / Of A Small Canadian / Community, / Peace / Shall / Destroy / Many." The wording inside the jacket went even further. Mennonites, it claimed in language that treated them as unusual creatures in today's modern world, adhered to "ancient tradition and beliefs" in their commitment to the principles of nonresistance.




In a time of national crisis, how would young people decide between "devotion to rigid religious principles" and "service to their adopted country"? In other words, would Mennonite young folk, during a period when a homogeneous Canadian culture was rather dogmatically defined by mainline "English" presuppositions, become failed Canadians or not? With the dust jacket, the publisher in effect yanked the project out of the hands of Wiebe and his "Mennonite" readers – hijacking the meaning and achievement of the novel. Mennonite readers, already anxious about their identity within Canada, must have interpreted the wording on the flap inside the jacket as disciplining them, putting them on notice.

Not surprisingly, the text on the dust jacket – reflecting the desires of a publisher anxious about the commercial viability of Wiebe's manuscript – surely would have prompted church leaders to question the "propriety" of what they took to be Wiebe's willingness to compromise their image, placing it so melodramatically and ostentatiously in the hands of the "English."[1] In expressing their concerns they were unintentionally echoing the voice of Deacon Block, who in Wiebe's novel accused Joseph Dueck of having "slandered" the church in English to a young people's group that included "English" and "Indians." Wiebe's fictional character, Block, defended a Mennonite culture that remained isolated from the broader world; Joseph Dueck, like Wiebe, wanted the Mennonite-Christian to take on multiple voices and roles in both the church and the world.

Even Peter Klassen, a worldly-wise musicologist and teacher at Mennonite Brethren Bible College who reviewed the novel for the [*Mennonite Brethren*] *Herald* while Wiebe was editor [of the *Herald*], found that "the printing on the jacket" made it "difficult to refrain from read-

ing further." Klassen recommended the novel, though he predicted – fairly accurately – that it would "appeal to all and upset many."[2] Klassen believed that the Mennonite Brethren were "confused" in thinking about "culture"; he argued that too many Mennonite Brethren persisted in fearfully confusing "culture" with "worldliness."[3] An "intellectual of considerable capacity," Klassen was a Wiebe supporter who would have welcomed Wiebe's taunt to the old guard that the church of the day should be jarred "out of its stupor."[4]

Klassen's positive and sensitive review – at odds with the reductive slogans of the dust jacket – put the [MB] Board of Publications in a strange position, when one of its own members responded with the frantic suggestion that Klassen be made to resign from his teaching position. Anyone who entertained such a suggestion would have benefited from reading the mellow review in a Toronto newspaper by Edgar Metzler, a pastor in the (Old) Mennonite Church. Metzler – who, like Klassen, was able to see beyond the sensational language of the dust jacket – praised the novel as "an example of a growing critical self-consciousness which seeks to move ... to the question of the useful role this small group [of Mennonites] can fulfill in the world as part of the larger Christian family."[5] Metzler, who was then the executive secretary for the Mennonite Central Committee, had earlier written to Wiebe to praise his editorial leadership of the *Herald*, grateful for the "clear and consistent" Christian voice it provided.[6]

[1] W.J. Keith, *A Voice in the Land* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1961), 50.

[2] Peter Klassen, review of *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, Oct. 12, 1962.

[3] Klassen, "Mennonites and Culture," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, Sept. 21, 1962.

[4] Wiebe, "The Artist as Critic and Witness," in *A Voice in the Land*, ed. W.J. Keith (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981), 47.

[5] Edgar Metzler, quoted by Keith in *A Voice in the Land*, 51.

[6] Metzler, unpublished letter to Rudy Wiebe, Nov. 12, 1962. University of Calgary archive, Rudy Wiebe papers, Accession 888/12.6, Box 16, File 1.

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**The Genealogy Corner: The Ties that Bind**

# General Michael Loewen: Fact or Fiction?

*Second in a series of articles*

By Bill and Norma (Loewen) Male

All of the Mennonite Loewen family trees have been traced back to a General Michael Loewen who, according to the GRANDMA database, "…was a Prussian General who was instrumental in bringing the Thirty Years War to a close. Late in life he converted to pacifism and was baptised at the age of 92 by the Mennonite Pastor, Georg Hansen. Reportedly there was an equestrian statue in his honour in the Danzig area. A family record reports he was born in 1606 and married Sara Ewert (Eckhart?) in 1630. His image is engraved in stone as a hero and can be seen by the Arch-gate (Bogentor). He lived in Marienwerder and lived to be 106 years old." His first descendant of record (first Prussian census in 1772) is his great-great-grandson, also named Michael Loewen, who was born in 1744 in Tiegenhoff, Gross Werder, Prussia (Poland before 1772).

To date, no one has been able to find any record of General Michael Loewen. There are no reports of his name in any of the history books about Poland or the Thirty Years War, which is puzzling especially if, as reported, he was a key figure in bringing the Thirty Years War to an end. So, he remains a somewhat mythical character in the Loewen ancestry. The following is a summary of the history of Poland during his reported lifetime which might help to clarify his military experience.

### A calamitous war

Michael Loewen would have been about 12 to 18 years old when the Thirty Years War began in 1618 and about 36 to 42 years old when it ended in 1648. According to the book, *The Thirty Years War: a Sourcebook* by Peter H. Wilson published in 2010: "The Thirty Years War was the greatest man-made calamity to befall Europe before the twentieth century. ... It has variously been presented as the culmination of an age of 'religious wars' beginning with the Protestant Reformation in 1517. … The main focus of the fighting was the Holy Roman Empire, a political organization first established in 800 that claimed direct descent from an-

cient Rome and considered itself superior to all other European states. The Empire encompassed modern Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Luxembourg, parts of eastern France, western Poland and southern Denmark."

The war began with the Bohemian Revolt in 1618 which was a revolt by Protestant aristocrats protesting the restriction of crown appointments to Catholics. The only record we can find of Polish involvement in this war was at the Battle of White Mountain (northwest of Prague). In 1620 there were reportedly 4550 Polish troops (cavalry) in support of the Empire against the Bohemians. In 1620 Michael Loewen would have been between 14 and 18 years old. If he was in fact involved in the Thirty Years War, this could have been his first military experience.

Illustration of a peasant begging for mercy in front of a burning barn.
Source: Wikipedia, Thirty Years War

In addition to Germany, the Thirty Years War involved, at various stages, Bohemians, Danish, Swedish and French. It ended with the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) by which Germany gave the same rights to Calvinists as to Catholics and Lutherans. Sweden received Bremen, Verden and western Pomerania. The mouths of the Elbe and Oder (Wolin) were held by the Danes and Swedes respectively. The last Swedish soldiers did not leave until 1654. For Germany, the impact was enormous. Between a third and half of the population were killed. Estimates suggest that the population fell from 21 to 13 million. Who, like General Michael Loewen, would not have turned to pacifism late in life after such devastating warfare?

**The involvement of Poland in the War**

History states that Poland was not a significant player in the religious Thirty Years War specifically, perhaps because as Norman Davies states in his book, *Europe: A History*: "In this world of growing religious intolerance, Poland-Lithuania occupied a place apart. … It contained a mosaic of the Catholic, Orthodox, Judaic and Muslim faiths even before Lutheranism claimed the cities of Polish Prussia or Calvinism a sizeable section of the nobility." "In this period Poland could rightly boast of its role …. as Europe's prime haven of toleration*."*

Coincident with The Thirty Years War was the Polish -Swedish war (1626-1629). In addition to Sweden's conflicts with Germany, the Swedes wanted to control Danzig, Poland, one of the richest ports in Europe. They focused on General Michael Loewen's home region of the Vistula Delta to control trade entering or leaving the area. With the help of German mercenaries, the Poles chased the Swedes southward to their headquarters in Marienburg in 1628 and eventually northward. The Truce of Altmark ended the conflict in 1629. Sweden retained control of the mouth of the Vistula Delta east of Danzig. This war occurred when Michael Loewen was between 20 and 30 years old; so, in addition to the earlier Bohemian Revolt, this could also have been some of his early military experience.

His later military experience could have come in 1651 when Polish armies moved into Ukraine where at the three-day Battle of Boresteczko they defeated Cossack rebels and their Tatar allies. This was the largest European land battle of the seventeenth century.

In 1655, the Swedes, under King Charles X Gustav, continued to extend their control of the Baltic. The result is known as the Second Northern War (1655-1660). The Polish king, John II Casimir (1648-1668) of the House of Vasa, fled. Lithuania was detached from Poland and came under the control of Sweden. Poland was occupied. The Swedes looted and burned churches, inciting a local peasant revolt. Polish peasants massacred stranded Swedish soldiers and some detachments. The Tatars (Turkish Muslims from Ukraine and Russia) sent several thousand warriors at this time to assist the Polish army. The Swedes were assisted by troops from Brandenburg during which time they briefly controlled Warsaw. Denmark and Holland joined the Polish alliance and reclaimed Gdansk. In 1660, a peace was signed which

returned previously lost territory to Poland.

**A "Mennonite general"**

Based on this history, it appears that the information in the GRANDMA database linking General Michael Loewen to the Thirty Years War may have come from an earlier time when the Second Northern War between Sweden and Poland may have been seen as a continuation of the conflicts that subsequent historians labelled as the Thirty Years War. From the little unofficial information that we have about General Michael Loewen, it appears he lived in Poland (Elbing and Marienwerder) most of his life, as did four generations of his descendants. We suspect therefore, that since Poland had a relatively small role in the early Thirty Years War, it is far more likely that General Michael Loewen could have achieved his reported military notoriety in Poland from the events in which Poland was more directly involved – those being the Polish conflicts with Sweden, the first of which began coincident with the Thirty Years War in 1626 and the second of which began and ended a few years after the Thirty Years War. The report that states he was honoured for ending the Thirty Years War perhaps should have said he was honoured for ending the Second Northern War with the Swedes, by which time General Michael Loewen was about 55 years old.

## Attending the Gallery Surreptitiously

By Bill Thiessen

Today I attended the state of the art Mennonite Heritage Museum in Abbotsford – as a gallery attendant/docent. Filling in, I learned, as I arrived, that the regular co-attendant was ill. That left me as both co-attendants, as well as receptionist! A three-fold role.

In my favourite Jamaican jargon: "No Problem"; I have multi-tasked before!

I must confess upfront: during the course of the day I engaged in illicit activity during the "down moments."

The dilemma: how will I straddle delectable bumble berry *plautz* and coffee, and the three-fold role of attending the gallery.

Fortunately, attendance was erratic, although attendees came in small clusters – from Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton, Abbotsford, Chilliwack, including a pastor who came with an intention to study the walls of information.

Most visitors were first-timers; the interest levels varied; some wished "docent service," others only company or guidance. Two married couples were on their way back from several Blue Jay-Mariner games. In Abbotsford they checked online for tourist sites and spotted this "Mennonite Museum." Curiosity drew them; they were eager to absorb the information. A senior woman, a retired career teacher came with her grandson and his fiancée, excitedly introducing them to this history: her heritage. She had witnessed the City approval of the Museum project.

Several sought assistance with family histories and genealogy. I ushered them to the upper level. A mother came with her young daughter Erin, who sought information about her family history; it was an assignment from her school – a local public school, Mouat. In less than a half hour she proudly – and somewhat in disbelief – left with 50 pages, tracing her family history back to the 1400s! A great service from "Historical" staff.

Six hours on the job allowed for some space to reflect, read, write, as well as some Google moments – illicitly.

I sought news updates – recent disasters – and more. However, I was "tempted" to seek the latest from the Trump Chroniclers. Sources in abundance!

One "reliable" source I suspiciously thought might be: *The Daily Bonnet*. One release led me to another – literal luring. "Donald Trump has begun to tweet in fluent Low German"; "Melania was spotted walking through a Mennonite farmer's field in Kansas in Amish garb" (photo included); "Dutch Blitz players in Pennsylvania are now required to wear full body armour," after some fatal injuries; "Coca-Cola adds common Mennonite first names to labels, like Abe, Menno, Nettie and Taunte Tina, with great success, to combat the competition from Pepsi-Cola, the favourite Mennonite drink." "Abe" was sold out in 20 minutes!

I could not curb my curiosity …

"A man takes 'Naked Anabaptist' too literally. The author of the book is ashamed at the literal interpretation – in London."

There was more – off the path *Daily Bonnet* news – much more – some of it truly illicit! Thankfully my "temptation" was curtailed by multi-tasking obligations, and by irresistible bumble berry *plautz*. Back to reading Menno, attending fascinated visitors, like the Gores from Fairfield Island, which even resulted in a drawn bouquet in the guest book – or was it a "bonnet?"

**From the Archives**

# The ordeal of an appendicitis attack in 1916

A letter by Kornelius Neufeld. Transcribed and translated by Peter and Helga Neudorf from typewritten and Gothic script, December 2009.

Fig. 21. — Une opération d'appendicite.

Source: Wikipedia, Appendectomy

*Because of some very graphic language on surgery and bodily complications, a few sections of the letter have been excluded in this published version. The complete version can be accessed at the MHSBC office.*

Sergeyevka, December 17 (1916)

Dear kin Hermann and Katharina Neufeld: I wish you God's blessings. After my long silence to you my loved ones, I shall try and write a little. We are almost healthy again, except that the wound resulting from the operation is not quite healed, and then our Tine has been sickly for some days. I shall try, as much as I can remember, to describe my illness.

On September 19 I drove to Kherson for business reasons. As often was the case, Hermann and Lena also came along. Hermann carried on to Yekaterinoslav; Lena and I left for home on the 22nd. I felt so heavy emotionally, and at night on the boat my right side was painful; this became increasingly uncomfortable to the point of being unbearable. Lena tried to help by rubbing my side but to no avail. We came home around noon, it got worse, the pain spread throughout my whole body, a pain that is indescribable, as though my intestines would tear. We sent for the army medic from Klein [Small] Lepeticha. He gave me an enema, but it was as though paralysis had set in, the water did not return, the chills set in to the extent that the bed was shaking, I thought I was nearing my end. Oats were warmed and laid on my body with containers of hot water; the fever receded but the pain carried on with small breaks.

The next day the illness increased to an unbearable state. Again we sent for the army medic who then returned. Immediately we also sent for the doctor in Kamenka. The field medic attempted to remove the water from yesterday, he was successful, and this resulted in some relief.

Since then I have taken different laxatives, as well as Franz Joseph bitter water [a salted drink used for constipation] which definitely works [normally] in two hours, but after seven hours it still had no effect. The next day was Sunday and at noon the doctor from Kamenka arrived. First I was bathed in a good warm bath (which I had previously done) and that was very pleasant. Then it was enemas, but the amount of water with soap, it seemed as though I was being filled, but then there was relief. Again I was given laxatives immediately which took effect in four hours.

It was believed that improvement would result, but illness had set in, resulting in a high temperature, bowel movements as normal, but there was pain in the right side. In a week's time it appeared that the hour of departure had arrived, I felt the movement of the blood slowing, weakness to the point that speech was almost impossible. With the injections of camphor the heart was strengthened and it had the victory.

With all this happening I was again sent to the doctor at Kamenka; nothing helped. Then three weeks at home

with unbearable pain. O how I wished that I could die, it was a terrible pain, I felt my nerves getting weak, thought I would have a nervous breakdown. Nobody was allowed to speak to me, the sight of me was unbearable, I could not pray, it seemed that everything was gone. Then my dear wife prudently started to mention going to Kherson, I started to listen, it created the thought, will it relieve my pain, I resolved to go. So we left on October 20 for Kherson: Joh.[ann] Koslowsky, Gerh.[ard] Enns, the medic Malitzky, our Tine and my dear wife. As we left it came to me, so this is the last, you will not see Sergeyevka again. The departure from my dear children was silent, no words, the excitement was too great. So we went in two wagons to the boat but it was very difficult. So we came to Kherson. Prior to our departure we had asked and sent Br.[other] Joh.[ann] Martens to arrange a hospital for us. This he had done with Bonch-Sosmalowsky. When we arrived and I had been examined, the doctor declared that, since he was in such high demand (he was a military doctor), he could not accept me, but in his opinion an operation was definitely required; he thus sent us to the Red Cross to Doctor Schaad. Our military medic went there and made the necessary arrangements for my admittance. Doctor Schaad is the brother to calendar-maker Schaad in Prischib. Men of his equal are rare.

I was assigned a private room where my dear wife could be with me day and night. Dr. Schaad examined me on the same day but did not want to operate immediately, rather ordered potassium applications four times a day for half an hour. This resulted in a reduction of the swelling on my right side. On the second day a group of three doctors examined my heart, lungs, and my right side and then put [the surgery] on hold for three days, although every day I was re-examined. On the fifth day four doctors decided that next day I would be operated on but without chloroform; this was a concern. Then DK. [?] Bonch-Sosmalowsky returned and spoke in good German, "With the operation the children will keep their father, but with chloroform they would lose him; the heart is too weak and the lungs too stressed." Thus I had arrived at what I had wanted; I found the uncertainty unbearable. I said to Schaad that it would have been better for me to have stayed home and died.

On the fifth day four doctors decided that next day I would be operated on but without chloroform; this was a concern.

It turned into a very hard night. – Oh, I was so afraid, it seemed like I could not find the Lord Jesus, till it suddenly came to me, "I am with you all the days" – Oh, then suddenly he was so near and I could discuss everything with him, they were serious hours but blessed hours. I became happy, all fear disappeared, I was able to sleep a little, but then it was morning, and then noon, the appointed hour!

Johann Neufeld and two orderlies came with a stretcher and I was placed on it and carried into the operating room and laid on the operating table and prepared. My right side was soaped and shaved with a razor and then thoroughly washed with iodine and alcohol. Then Schaad (he operated) injected where the cut was to be, I only felt the first needle prick. *[The following sentence, graphic description of the surgery, has been deleted.]* It was all painless until the doctor searched for the appendix (unfortunately buried to the sight), with his hand, I felt a severe pain. My illness was diagnosed as an infected appendix which was swollen with pus, thus causing my incredible pain. Yes, if nature had not been helpful and the colon had not engulfed the appendix and thus isolated the pus, it would have ruptured and the pus would have spread throughout the abdominal area and death would have come quickly.

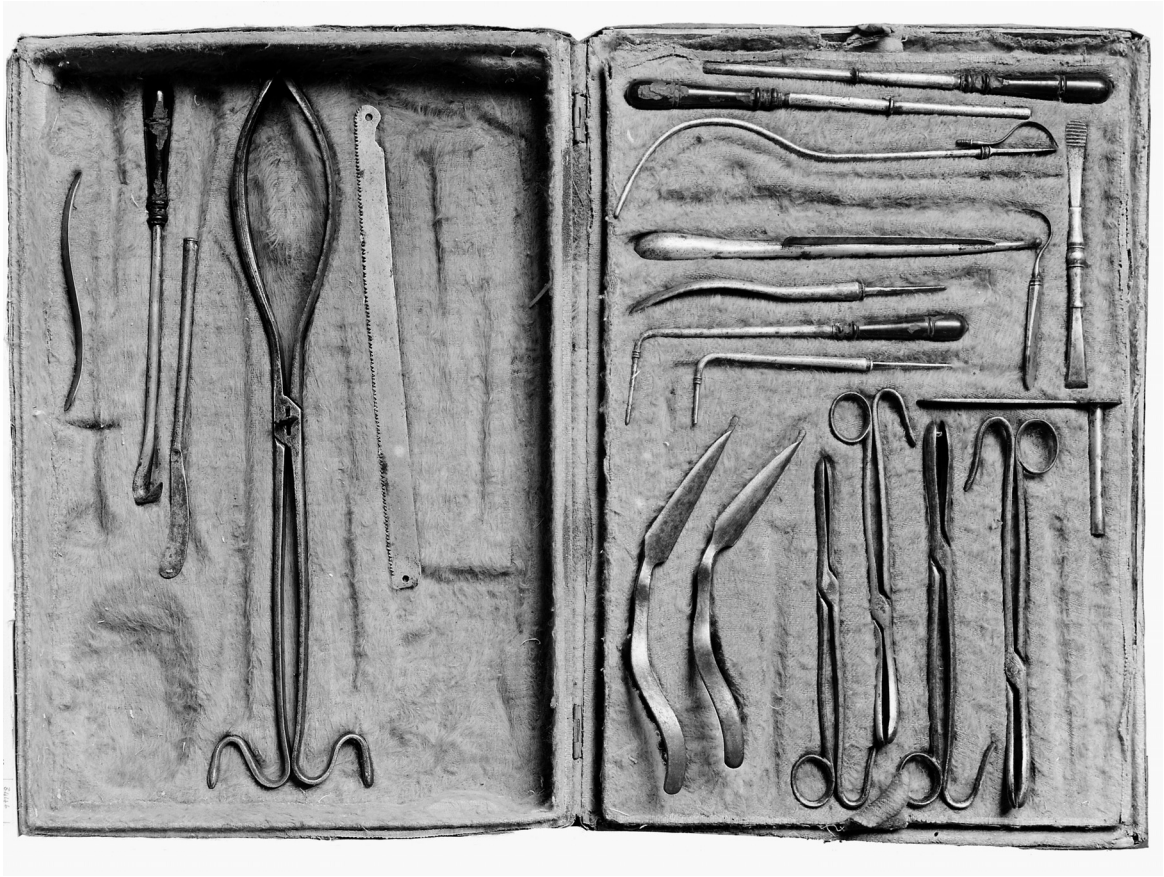
The operation lasted about two hours, with three doctors and one nurse involved. The first bandage was on for two days, but what a stench when it was removed (like a bowel movement). *[Deleted section.]* After this I was bandaged daily. The pus had various appearances. For eight days I had to lie on my back (which had been the case prior). When I was helped to sit up, though, I couldn't do it, and walking was the same; it seemed as though it had all been forgotten [bodily movement], but after a


The "water cure," still practiced today.
Source: Wikipedia, Kneippkur

few days it came back and I could walk.

I am fed up with the typewriter. [Written at the letter's edge. Henceforth the letter is handwritten in Gothic script.]

It was a misery that I could not eat; as soon as I ate, belching and vomiting resulted, so that at home I ate very little and in Kherson for two days prior to the operation I made no effort to eat anything. After the operation I could not drink water, my thirst was great, it was eased with eating apples. So we stayed in Kherson for about three weeks, and [the wound] was bandaged daily. When it had healed to the point that the rubber tube could only be inserted about half the length of a finger, it was the doctor's opinion that there was no more danger, so we decided to return home. A basket of bandaging material was provided for our return. After we arrived at the boat and had travelled for a while, I did not feel well. I should note that Schaad sent along two orderlies for our assistance, namely John Neufeld and Abraham Janzen from Georgstal. During the night on the boat I had a high temperature and headache. We arrived at Groβ [Big] Lepeticha, and from there by covered wagon we travelled home. Upon arrival at home, I felt bad; my temperature was 37.7 (much too high); on another day it climbed to 40.2, I was very ill, thought I might not survive. The medic inspected my wound; it had really swollen as a result of the travelling. *[Deleted section.]*



Case of medical instruments. Source: Wikipedia

My condition improved, as by applying ice on the wound my temperature returned to normal. So we carry on. My dear Anna is the medic, bandages and cleans the wound which now on December 30 has a depth of about five inches. It appears to be healing externally which is not desirable. It appears that this is how I will spend this winter. I am up, but weak, especially my legs. So if we keep living and it is God's will, then we shall get together in this lifetime. Then we can talk to each other about everything.

My wound since yesterday has improved; it is now only 3¾ inches deep. It seems to be pulling together internally; hopefully I will be better soon.

Our Tine for all intents and purposes was well. For Christmas Jacob Wedel came over, and so it was decided that the wedding would be on January 15. But Tine caught a cold at Christmas time and developed influenza and pleurisy. If this does not change very soon, the wedding will have to be delayed. Our father is ailing considerably, and if his health does not improve it is unlikely that he will see springtime. Mother is so helpless; she cannot dress or undress herself anymore. Bodily she is in better health than father. Mrs. Johann Janzen and Jacob Janzen are now involved in a health remedy; namely the Jew is here, and he heals in his own way; it seems to help. Jacob Janzen's right arm was totally paralyzed, but now he can move it. Lena can move her legs. May God help. It has been said that the Kneipp Cure [Sebastian Kneipp, Bavarian priest, 1821-97; one of the first naturopaths; treated patients with "hydrotherapy," diet, and exercise] is not a remedy for humans but for horses (it cures either/or).

Well, for this time I shall close. The letter has come to an end on January 2, 1917. I wish you a happy new year and may the Lord of Grace give you and us much wisdom that we may become what God wills. Heartfelt greetings to the John Neufelds, Letkemans, your children, and also your siblings Kornelius and Anna Neufeld.

Abraham Enns came over last year on December 30 from Siberia apparently looking for work. He says the beginnings of the settlement are extremely difficult.

If no special news arrives, the wedding will proceed on January 15.

Kornelius Neufeld

*Peter Neudorf is translating from German five diaries of Anna Janzen Neufeld, b. 1868, married Kornelius Neufeld. Two other of her diaries have been lost. Peter writes:*
Kornelius Neufeld (#98168 on the GRANDMA Mennonite genealogy database) was my wife's grandfather, born 1869. Herman was Kornelius Neufeld's brother, born 1860. The father died when Kornelius was 7 years old. Herman had a son Herman who ended up marrying Kornelius' daughter, his cousin Anna. Son Herman bought the *Rundschau* in the United States, moved it first to Winkler MB and then to Winnipeg. In 1945 he sold it for about $33,000 to, I believe, 8 MB people. The note for Kornelius (on the GRANDMA database as of 2015) is clearly wrong when it says he continued to operate the factory till 1922 when he obviously died in 1917. The remaining family of 17 left on the last German troop train to leave Russia in the feed car for the horses on the 23 of Nov. 1917, and as they say in their memoirs, as the horse consumed the hay they had more room. My wife's grandmother and family ended up living at Kronwestheim not far from Stuttgart till 1922 when finally the order-in-council of May 1, 1919 was revoked by Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, and Mennonites were again allowed to emigrate to Canada.

# The Glory Days of MEI Basketball

By Vern Giesbrecht

When a sports committee headed by Henry Klassen painted lines for basketball on a small, concrete-floored auditorium at Mennonite Educational Institute in the late 1940s, no one could have imagined that teams from this school would eventually dominate the competition in the Fraser Valley and sometimes the entire province.

Early teams played in long pants, but shorts were eventually allowed; there were no showers for the sweaty players and certainly no cheerleaders. Mattresses were draped over the edge of the stage to cushion the impact as players dashed in for lay-ups. Some opposing teams refused to play in the tiny gym.

Nevertheless, by 1956 a team coached by Jake Unger and captained by Ed Janzen qualified for the BC tournament. Although the team lost both its games, 62-34 to Alberni and 49-41 to Mission, this was a significant accomplishment and hinted at later successes.

In the 1960-61 season, volunteers, including students, laid a wooden floor over the cement but more importantly, another senior boys' team qualified for the BC tournament, and this time, it made more of an impact.

Coached by former MEI player Jack Suderman, a 20-year-old Bible school student, and with his brothers Henry and Ed in the lineup, the MEI team stunned the Abbotsford Panthers and Semiahmoo Totems in the Fraser Valley Tournament in Chilliwack to win a spot in the provincial championships, then won three games there, beating the Panthers again in overtime to take third place, the first of five consecutive top-four finishes for MEI teams.

Ed Suderman was named to the first all-star team, with teammates John Haak and Vic Rahn winning second-team honours.

The next season, with Ed Janzen as coach, MEI's seven-player team edged Abbotsford for the Fraser Valley crown on Ed Suderman's late jump-shot, then lost by one point to eventual champion Victoria to finish fourth in BC.

The "glory days" really began with the arrival of coaches Jake and Eva Braun. During their tenure, junior and senior boys' and girls' teams won twelve Fraser Valley championships and three provincial crowns. Two teams were undefeated, the 1963 senior boys and 1965 junior boys.

Jake Braun had graduated from Sharon High School in Yarrow (he remembers playing in a haymow against MEI) and had coached in Kansas and California before coming to MEI.

Balding, small in stature, with an undistinguished playing background, Braun nevertheless commanded respect. He seldom shouted but in his gravelly voice he let players know what he wanted and how.

"He was his own man," captain Ed Suderman recalled many years later. "If six words sufficed, he wouldn't use seven."

The 1963 MEI championship basketball team
Back row L-R: Ernie Brown, Peter Hooge, Dan Ratzlaff, Mr. Braun, Howard Loewen, Jim Falk, Wes Giesbrecht, David Cornies
Front row L-R: Albert Pauls, Harold Derksen, Vern Giesbrecht, Ed Suderman, George Heidebrecht, Don Wallace, Dennis Neumann
Photo credit: 1963 MEI Evergreen Yearbook

Braun admitted he didn't give out compliments readily.

"I think I was a bit too slow in heaping praise on someone," he confided in a 1994 interview. "I could have used a little more of that, but my attitude was, you've done this very well, but you can do it even better still. Too much praise rules out further incentive for the player."

Braun took an already strong team (five players were added to the seven-player squad of the previous season) and moulded them into champions, guiding them to 26 wins in a row, including convincing wins over the Kerrisdale junior men's team and the University of British Columbia junior varsity.

All home games were held in Abbotsford and standing-room only crowds of 1,200 were common, especially against the Panthers, now led by former MEI sharpshooter Vic Rahn. MEI beat the Panthers four times that season, then set a tournament scoring record that stood for twenty years in winning four games en route to its first provincial crown. Vancouver newspapers reported that 1,000 Clearbrook fans were among the 6,000 in attendance at UBC on March 16 to see MEI pull away in the last quarter to beat Alberni 58-40 in the final.

Playing with a badly-sprained ankle, Suderman scored 18 points and was named to the first all-star team for the third time. Jim Falk received second all-star award honours for the second time and George Heidebrecht, who scored 21 points and grabbed 18 rebounds in the final, also made the second all-star team.

At Clearbrook MB Church the next morning, where several players and the team managers sang in the choir, *Vancouver Province* sports columnist Eric Whitehead was in the pews, waiting to interview Suderman, who invited him home for lunch.

He wasn't the only reporter who had visited the Suderman hatchery on Clearbrook Road. Big-city reporters loved to play up the "country boys playing in haymows" angle, and as the top scorer on the team, Suderman was the centre of attention.

One scribe waxed eloquent: "The same dextrous fingers that can propel a basketball through the hoop with remarkable accuracy has been plucking eggs off the high speed conveyer belt for years as Suderman – the second youngest of 10 children – helps out in the family business."

In those days there were no divisions based on school size (A, AA, AAA, etc.), so much was made of the fact that MEI regularly played (and often defeated) schools with much larger populations.

Jake Braun's senior boys' teams finished third in BC the next two seasons, third again in in 1969 and then, in his final game as MEI coach in 1970, a team led by Rudy Siemens, George Bergen and Al Neumann edged Abbotsford 49-47 at the Pacific Coliseum in the first all-Fraser Valley final. After leaving MEI, he coached at Trinity Western University for several years.

Braun's tournament record of 17-5 remains as one of the best all-time, and in 2011 he was elected to the BC Basketball Hall of Fame.

While some of the other Hall of Fame inductees rambled on about their accomplishments, Braun's acceptance speech was very brief. He simply thanked God for the blessings in his life. He was the only one to receive a standing ovation.

Braun also had great success as a junior boys' coach, with three Fraser Valley championships and three top-three finishes in the provincial tournament, including an undefeated season in 1965 that was capped by Rick DeFehr's "buzzer-beater" against Vancouver College.

Eva Braun was also an excellent coach, winning five Fraser Valley championships with her junior and senior girls' teams.

Following the Braun era, a long line of dedicated coaches and strong teams kept MEI competitive in the basketball scene, especially in the Fraser Valley, where MEI basketball teams at various levels have won 17 Fraser Valley championships since Eva Braun's junior girls won the title in 1979.

In the 1960s and 1970s, MEI teams captured twenty Fraser Valley championships, giving the school 37 titles overall, including the banners won by the 2012 junior girls' and the 2015 junior boys' teams.

Former Killarney Cougar all-star Arnie Dick's long tenure as MEI coach included several trips to the provincial tournament with senior boys' teams (a record of 13-6) and two close second-place finishes in 1987 and 1995.

Long-time rival coach Rich Goulet of Pitt Meadows called Dick one of the toughest coaches to play against, saying Dick's teams were always well-prepared, fundamentally sound and strong defensively. In 1995, Dick was named high school senior boys' basketball coach of the year.

MEI teams won two provincial championships in the 1990s.

Playing in their large, modern gym at the "new MEI" on Downes Road, the 1994 junior boys' team coached by former player Pete Reimer defeated the very tall Abby Christian squad, and in 1999, the senior girls' team coached by Tim Smith and led by all-stars Katie Hall, Dana Friesen and Cassie Born defeated Heritage Park of Mission in a high-scoring final, 86-74.

MEI 50th reunion on March 16, 2013. L-R: Pete Hooge, Don Wallace, Howard Loewen, Ed Suderman, Dan Ratzlaff, Vern Giesbrecht, George Heidebrecht, Jim Falk. Photo courtesy of Vern Giesbrecht

MEI teams have taken part in what long-time observers consider some of the most exciting games ever in the 72-year history of the provincial tournament: the 66-64 overtime loss to eventual champions Prince Rupert in which George Heidebrecht scored 34 points before fouling out (1964); Harv Engbrecht's long shot from the corner with one second left to beat Prince Rupert in double-overtime in the 1969 tournament; and the 49-47 win over Abbotsford in the 1970 final at the Pacific Coliseum, Braun's last game as MEI coach.

Former coach Jake Braun, with son Jerry and daughter Christine, being honoured at the Hall of Fame dinner in 2011. Photo courtesy of Vern Giesbrecht

**MEI Basketball Trivia**

- Players on the first team to qualify for the provincial tournament (1956) were Ed Janzen, Werner Hooge, Walter Dahl, Nick Peters, Art Willms, Phil Ratzlaff, Don Neumann, Sig Polle, Jack Hooge, Ernest Loewen. Coach: Jake Unger.
- Former MEI principal Dave Neumann's sons Dennis and Al both won provincial championships (1963 and 1970). Dennis also played on two teams that finished third in BC; Al was a second-team all-star in the 1970 tournament.
- As a 10th-grader, Vic Rahn scored 36 points in MEI's first provincial tournament game in 1961 and helped the team beat Abbotsford in overtime to take third place. Then he transferred to Abbotsford where the Panthers lost three straight Fraser Valley championships to MEI and also lost by two points in the BC finals against Prince Rupert, despite Rahn's all-star efforts.
- Rahn later returned to MEI to coach two teams to top-four finishes in the late 1970s.
- Four MEI players have been named first team all-stars in the provincial tournament: Ed Suderman (three times), Jim Falk, George Heidebrecht, Rudy Wiebe, Harv Engbrecht, Rudy Siemens, George Bergen, Ken Klassen, Rob Schmidt, Paul Chaffee, Prentice Lenz, Joel Nickel, Mark Redekop and Joel Haviland. Surprisingly, only Heidebrecht was named MVP (1964).
- Many former MEI players have gone on to be successful coaches, including George Bergen, whose Walnut Grove team from Langley won the AAAA championship in March, 2017. Bergen's team also won the title in 2013 and finished second the previous season.
- Another successful coach is former MEI and Simon Fraser University star Prentice Lenz, who has coached both senior girls and senior boys at Abbotsford Secondary. In the 2016-2017 season, the girls' team twice beat defending champion Brookswood Bobcats and finished second in BC in the AAA division. Lenz's daughters Sienna and Marin were two of the top scorers on the team.
- Seven MEI players who competed in the provincial tournament have sons who also appeared in the season-ending championships: Dan Ratzlaff (Dale), Dave Loewen (Matt), Rick DeFehr (Matt and Steve), Phil Harder (Justin), Pete Reimer (Joel), Jay Pankratz (J.J.) and Scott Ratzlaff (Luke).
- The undefeated 1963 champions were honoured at three separate events in 2013, the fiftieth anniversary of their trophy: a Decade of Championships dinner at the Langley Events Centre in March, a reception in the MEI library in June and an MEI sports banquet that same evening. Coach Jake Braun, player Al Pauls and manager Ernie Brown have passed away, but ten of the surviving players were able to attend at least one of these events. Howard Loewen, Dean of Theology at Fuller Seminary, was the featured speaker at the sports banquet.
- Seventeen former MEI players and coaches Jake Braun and Arnie Dick are in the BC tournament record books for their accomplishments in the tournament: Paul Chaffee, Joel Haviland, Ben Neufeld, Jon Loewen, Vic Rahn, Matt Loewen, Prentice Lenz, George Heidebrecht, Harv Engbrecht, Ed Suderman, Jim Falk, Mark Redekop, Johnathan Inrig, Josh Hall, Ken Klassen, Brian Redekop and Joel Nickel.

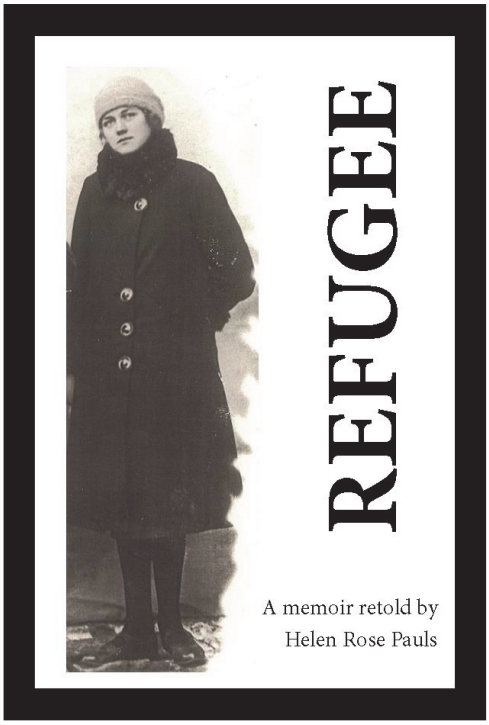
## Book Reviews

## Helen Rose Pauls. *Refugee: A memoir retold by Helen Rose Pauls*.

Self-published (Globe Printers), Chilliwack, 2016. 96 pp.

Reviewed by Robert Martens

The refugee story, apparently endless, goes on and on with horrible regularity. Russian Mennonites, of course, have their own version, fleeing their homeland in the 1920s and 1940s to find sanctuary in North and South America. In *Refugee*, that greater story is encapsulated in the life of one such person, Agnes Sawatsky Pauls, who suffered years of exile and imprisonment in the USSR before escaping with the retreating German army in 1943. Fraser Valley writer Helen Rose Pauls has put in written form the verbal reminiscences of Agnes, her mother-in-law, and the result is a narrative that cuts to the heart.




No book review could adequately speak to that story. The following excerpt might give an idea of how one person's resilience and faith brought her through unimaginable suffering with her spirit intact. The story begins in a work prison in the 1930s.

**Extract, *Refugee***

One night my name was called. My term of punishment for escaping from Siberia was over. My debt was paid, but I knew that upon my release I would be sent back to that awful slave labour camp in Siberia from which I had escaped. Once again I was downcast by fear and indecision. Now be sent back? I still had hopes of finding my family in Arkadak, where life must surely be more pleasant and perhaps a semblance of our former life would still go on. I tried to weigh the odds. Certainly, I was closer now than I ever would be again.

An opportunity presented itself and I took it. At nightfall when others were being counted before entering the prison compound for the evening meal, I hung back in the forest. Then I ran. I had no idea where we were or near what town our prison lay. I searched for railroad tracks as I knew they always led to a town. One evening about midnight I reached a train station, exhausted by fear and constant running, numb with cold and desperately hungry. Everywhere there were people milling around. Control was strong and the police were apprehending people left and right. I knew I could not stay.

"Your pass, madam, your pass, sir?" shouted the police. A pass! I had no pass. I could tell that my way was blocked once more and I would be apprehended. The future was completely hopeless. Without a pass I could not take a job. No work meant no food. I left the station and found a spot in the forest to say my last prayers.

Death would come easily, I thought, as I sank gratefully into the soft inviting snow. A pleasant numbness, a sweet forgetting and all would be over. Desperation weighed down each cell of my tired body as I shifted my weight for greatest comfort. Even from this distance, the din of the heaving rabble at the train station fell on my ears. I wrestled with God. I couldn't grasp this. My grandfather had been a preacher. My father had been a choirmaster and church leader, and a most conscientious Christian.

Our home had been peaceful. Where was God now?

My body shook and retched. All day I had not eaten, filling my mouth with snow to ward off fainting. And now all was hopeless. I would die here alone from hunger or cold, far from my loved ones.

Solemnly, I made a pact with God I had not addressed for a long time. I promised that I would thank and praise him all my life if he gave me one last chance. That I would help others and do good at every opportunity.

An amazing thing happened. It was as if the heavens opened and I saw God and the angels. A voice spoke. Was it inside me? Above me? I saw soft lights and a pleasant warmth surrounded me. The voice seemed to whisper, "You are my child. Get up. Shake the snow off your clothes and walk to a place that I will show you."

Dumbfounded, I arose, and walked as if in a daze. The station was behind me; the noises still clamouring in my ears. Far away, dogs barked. The night sky was gorgeous with stars. I was near to collapse and managed to walk forward with shuddering steps. A few modest homes were set back on the trail. Station workers' homes, I as-

sumed. My glance was directed to one small building. A light still shone. I had nothing to lose, although I knew that citizens were severely punished if they helped anyone without documents and anyone would be afraid not to report me. But prison meant death anyway. I knocked. (39-40)

*Refugee* can be purchased at the Mennonite Heritage Museum or from the author at ehpauls@shaw.ca.

## *Letters of a Mennonite Couple: Nicolai and Katharina Rempel. Russia: War and Revolution 1914-1917*.

Introduced and edited by Teodor Rempel. Translated by Teodor Rempel with Agatha Klassen. Fresno, CA: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2014. 246 pp.

Book review by Robert Martens

In 1956 Teodor Rempel took leave from his teaching position in California to spend ten days in Canada at the bedside of his dying father, Nicolai. Much of their conversation focused on the Mennonite family history of the father, and for the son the experience was occasionally difficult. "It was an attempt to become reconciled, to try to understand what had happened between us and why I had become so alienated from my Mennonite roots" (ix). A day before Teodor returned to the United States, his father handed him two bundles of letters tied together by twine. It turned out that there were 350 letters in total, and that nearly all of them belonged to a series of correspondences between a very young Nicolai and his wife, Tina, between 1914 and 1917.

Over the following three and a half decades the letters remained in storage, neglected except for sporadic readings by family members. Then in 2007 Teodor Rempel and his wife joined the Mennonite Heritage Cruise in Ukraine. Teodor had brought the letters with him and showed them to the cruise lecturer Paul Toews, historian and archivist at Fresno Pacific University (Paul died in 2015). Toews suggested that the letters be archived and perhaps published. Teodor Rempel subsequently took on the task of translating and editing the entire letter collection; Agatha Klassen helped with those letters that were written in traditional German Gothic script, which can be impenetrable for those accustomed to standard Western handwriting.

For Teodor Rempel, the translation effort was bittersweet. "To revisit parents long after they are gone is a privilege few people have" (x). Rempel had long felt a profound alienation from his ethnic history, having left the Mennonite milieu which he felt was "exclusionary." Still, when he entered the secular community, he felt "ill at ease there also with its social behavior and code" (xii). He and his father had been wrenched apart by their quarrels over Mennonite religion and culture: the father's insistence on staying within the tradition and the son's determination to leave it. "...[H]e asked me to forgive him for the wrongs he had done me. Was placing the letters in my trust his way of forgiving me for the pain I had caused him?" (xii)

In pre-revolutionary Russia, Mennonites had been granted the right to reject military service in exchange for work in the forests or, during the First World War, for service as medics to the wounded. In 1914 Nicolai Rempel, a young man in his twenties, left his wife, Tina (Katharina), and three children, as well as his beloved home village of Schoenfeld, to work as a medic on Russian trains carting the wounded back from the war front. He was one of about seven thousand Mennonite men to be recruited as medics. Over the next few years, Nicolai and Tina exchanged letters that are deeply intimate, revealing a marriage that was sometimes on the edge of breakdown. They portray their world from the perspective of two frail individuals living ordinary and yet extraordinary lives; they tell their stories of mundane daily existence as well as of the horrors of war; and in their eyewitness accounts, the momentous events of a revolutionary time spring vividly to life.

The first year of published letters, 1914, are all authored by Nicolai; Tina's letters for that year have been lost. Nicolai tells of his induction, of rumours of Russian victories and his own proud patriotism, of youthful bravado and careless pranks – and then the reality of the war sets in. He is soon working thirty-hour shifts and more, and tells of feeling unspeakably fatigued. He is growing up very quickly. "A freight train had just pulled up next to ours with approximately 1,000 wounded soldiers, who lay in filthy freight cars terribly overcrowded. ... There were no heaters in those freight cars and it was cold. The wounded men had built fires directly on the floors, never mind the smoke that filled the car. These poor fellows just wanted to be warm. There were no bedsteads; the floors were covered with horse manure. For four days they had eaten nothing. When we gave them the bread, they devoured it as ravenously as wild animals. You simply can't imagine it" (18-19). Again and

again Nicolai complains about the incompetence of those in administration, unable to provide proper care for the wounded and seemingly indifferent to their plight. At the same time, he is feeling that time spent outside the insular world of the Mennonite colonies is somehow freeing. Of his friends who may be inducted, he writes, "It will be good for many of them if they get away from home for a while" (25).

Wedding Katharina and Nicolai Rempel July 20, 1909

Source: *Letters of a Mennonite Couple*

Tina's letters, saved from 1915 on, tell a different story altogether: the stresses of screaming children, helping with the family business, doing the chores and housework, quarrelling with family. "I am losing weight and I don't know why. I guess it may be because I am worrying so often about the future, what it will bring" (55). Later she writes of her listlessness: "Sometimes I have the feeling that I am not worthy in God's eyes. Then nothing seems to matter. I feel as though I really don't know how to train our children" (125).

Meanwhile, Nicolai is continually haranguing his wife to write more often and more extensively – and in the letters that follow upon these tantrums, he invariably apologizes. Although the couple long for each other's presence, the relationship is straining under the weight of separation. A kind of anxiety disorder is afflicting Nicolai, quite understandable – and common – under the circumstances. Some of the couple's most intense moments occur in 1915. Tina first writes of her love: "Well, I find it hard to express how very much I love you. At times I have such a strong yearning for you that I don't know what to do. That's how it is when one is married" (91-92). Nicolai replies: "I really have begun to notice how numbed I have become to the voice of God: how powerless my prayers are. ... Everything seems cold and numb in and around me, cold and hard as stone. When, but when, will this ever change? We have been torn from each other without mercy or love" (93).

The marriage, however, endures. Tina continues to send her husband – when she can – coffee and butter, seemingly indispensable to the Mennonite palate.

In 1916, Nicolai is reassigned to administrative duty in Moscow. Revolutionary fervour is mounting, and Nicolai is swept along with it. Like many young men and women, he is reacting to the perceived oppressiveness of life at home. The people of Schoenfeld, he writes, "look on us here as though we are little children who still need the guiding hand of the old fogies. That time, thank God, is past. For some three years now, we medics have looked on in dismay and disgust as we have been betrayed and lied to by the very men whom we looked to as our leaders – those who said to us when we were conscripted, 'Brothers, go out in joy. We will look after your families. They shall lack nothing.' How shamefully they deceived us whenever possible" (176-177).

Nicolai has become an activist, marching in the street with protesters and listening admiringly to political speeches. "If you stand back in objective judgment," he writes, "and ask isn't the worker a human being just like his master? Why should he exist in subservience all his life and be debased through his labor and reap no benefit? You must conclude that this situation is inexplicable and that the worker would be justified if he were to rise up in indignation and claim his right by brute force" (184). Tina responds that she shares his disgust for the rich Mennonite elite, the estate owners. It is not long, however, before food shortages afflict Moscow, random violence escalates, and a "massive despondency" (205) descends on the city. Nicolai's enthusiasm for the revolution quickly evaporates. And here the letters end.

Teodor Rempel's book could have used some better proofing, as spelling and grammatical glitches are not uncommon. In this volume of letters, though, he has provided a moving account of how two quite ordinary human beings cope with the stresses of war, hunger, loneliness, and political violence. Near the end of the book, Rempel describes his ambivalence over publishing letters that so openly demonstrate Nicolai's unjust outbursts of temper and Tina's grating sense of inadequacy. But the letters also bear witness, he says, to the couple's self-sacrificial love and care for others. "If that were all these letters show," writes Rempel, "publishing them would not be justified. However, they do show more than that.

... They reveal the utter stupidity that ignited and fueled the war that consumed millions of lives. ... If these letters induce us to work as diligently, as tirelessly, against war as war demands of us, then, I believe, Tina and Nicolai would consent to opening these letters for all to read" (220).

*Letters of a Mennonite Couple* can be accessed in the MHSBC library or purchased at the Mennonite Heritage Museum.

## *Beyond Expectations: The Life and Ministry of James and Elfrieda Nikkel*

Author/Publisher James and Elfrieda Nikkel, 2017. 229 pp.

Book Review by James Toews

Carefully looking back on one's life is a process we should all engage in. Taking the time to do this – and to then write this down and publish it – is rare. When James asked for a review of his retrospective, I briefly hesitated because it is safer not to review a friend's personal treasure. But it was a brief, possibly imperceptible pause and I accepted. The moment of trepidation soon became a season of joy.

It was early into reading the book that its winsome character captured me. 1 Sam 7:12 came to mind. "Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us.'" This book is the "Ebenezer" of James and Elfrieda Nikkel. Like Samuel's marker it serves to tell the stories of one generation to the next. A classic Mennonite picture of the iconic Chortitza Oak symbolically spreads its ancient branches over the story.

The story begins with a merger, in James and Elfrieda, of two families representing two streams of Russian Mennonites (the 1870s and the 1920s) settling into Manitoba. The story is mostly confined to the Mennonite Brethren branch of the larger Mennonite family, describing how the MBs spread across Manitoba and the prairies, joining up with other streams in Canada, the US and around the world. James would write a book called *Antioch Blueprints: A Manual of Church Planting Information and Church Growth Strategies*, which, while prescriptive, is also very descriptive of the book's narrative. In *Beyond Expectations* one watches how one set of mustard seeds grows into a flourishing plant.


But beyond being a personal memoir, this book is also the story of a generation of MB pioneers, spelled out in the language of their spirituality, their mission and their sense of being at crossroads. And all this is done with a profound sense of God's providence and leading.

Some readers will find familiar people and places of their own in this story. Initially this kept me reading. Although I lived most of my life in a different MB centre of gravity there was hardly a page where something or someone familiar was not present. Reading the book became a personal journey. For me the mission in Esperanza on Vancouver Island, the Ukrainian ministry and the Malawi church stories were especially meaningful.

Other readers will appreciate the book for its descriptions of the markers and turning points in MB and particularly the Canadian MB narrative. As a scholar himself, James has taken the time to ensure that places and dates are well marked and of course does so with the appropriate disclaimer allowing for varying memories and interpretations.

It was with reference to the Canadian MB narrative that I became more and more convinced that this book should be required reading for the current planners and architects of the MB future. It gives an overview of the dreams and strategies of previous generations as they now forge ahead with "new" visions. Particularly fascinating for me is the DMI story (Disciple Making International). It began as the vision of Abbotsford entrepreneur Peter Loewen, and was based on the deceptively simple strategy of telling one's faith story cross-culturally. It was deliberately short term. From inauspicious beginnings an astonishing network of ministries and relationships now exists around the world.

The times are vastly different. The language of evangelism has morphed. Relatively vast financial resources are now at play. And a world that is as close as the next airport is almost instantly laid out before us. But the practical challenges of forming and then executing a vision, of mobilizing and herding workers, remain the same. What also remains the same is the

peculiar complexity of both successes and failures. Vision casters rarely have time for the kind of careful reflection of the past that this book gives the reader. This is a weakness inherent in visionaries and the inevitability of needless new failures is the result. That is a caution not likely to land where it is needed and may hence effectively be redundant.

What is not redundant is this book's reminder that in all schemes, large and small, the call of the Gospel begins and ends with the stories of lives transformed in the process of following Jesus.

*Beyond Expectations* tells in a captivating manner how James and Elfrieda were involved in that process of following. Reading this story will bless those who engage it.

*James Toews pastors at the Neighbourhood Church in Nanaimo.*

## Film Review

### *Many Voices, One Song: The Story of Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship*

Director Amy Dwight. Producer Rosie Perara. 26 min. 54 sec. https://pgimf.org/movie

Reviewed by Robert Martens

*A genuine Christian faith cannot be idle, but it changes, renews, purifies, sanctifies, and justifies more and more. It gives peace and joy. Happy is the person who has it and keeps it to the end.*

With these words from Menno Simons begins and ends a documentary on Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship (PGIMF). Although this congregation welcomes a wide diversity of visitors and attendees, traditional Mennonite values – whatever those might be – seem to be cherished at Point Grey.

The film begins with a question to church members: why do you attend Point Grey? The responses are wildly varied; they include "I come because" … "a very deep faith" is expressed here; "of all the churches I have attended, this is the first real church"; it speaks to a "return to my Mennonite roots"; "I don't go away frustrated"; "I love this community"; and there is "opportunity to interact and ask questions after the sermon."

And how were individuals originally drawn to Point Grey? They learned, for example, that the congregation focuses "on the life of Jesus" and insists on an "ethic of living a peaceful and simple life."

Point Grey had small beginnings. In September 1986, says Erna Friesen, a tiny group sat around a table and discussed a new project. A building was purchased from the Catholic Church; the structure was rechristened Menno Simons Centre and refitted as a not-for-profit dormitory for students attending the University of BC. "How best," asks John Friesen, "do we serve students?" The Fellowship's services take place in the Menno Simons Centre chapel where, sitting along with older regular attendees, "many students have come and gone" (J Friesen). In addition, Point Grey has developed a relationship with theology students from nearby Regent College; the chapel is a warm and welcoming place for young scholars to test their ideas through a homily/lecture on Sunday morning.

At Point Grey, "dialogue is central," says a member. "Everyone feels they can let loose," says another. There is a "broad spectrum of thought" and members are free to "express their doubts," say others. Seating is arranged in three sections that face each other, thus promoting a face-to-face relationship. Activities like potlucks – a Mennonite tradition, one member remarks – further help connect a diverse congregation. Four-part harmony choral singing also bonds the members of PGIMF.

"We are not a top-down congregation," says John Friesen. Evan Kreider points out that Point Grey had a pastor for two or three years, but it didn't work out all that well. The congregation reverted to multiple leadership: "We all have to work so much harder," says Erna Friesen.

Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship may be looking for a new space in which to worship. In the meanwhile, this talented congregation, which as one member remarks, includes everything from PhDs to farmers, continues to gather as it has for 31 years. The documentary on Point Grey focuses on the positives and says less about the history of the church and any difficulties it may have encountered. Nevertheless, a well-made film.

# Roots and Branches

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## Volvos of Lebanon: Stories of Refugees, Resilience, and Reliable Cars

By Scott D. Campbell

Since the start of the Syrian Civil War in the spring of 2011, Lebanon has been on the front lines of the Middle East refugee crisis with over 1 million people entering the country seeking asylum. Today, one in four people living in Lebanon has been displaced from Syria, Iraq or Palestine.

In May 2016, a group of Mennonite Central Committee staff, board members and volunteers travelled to Lebanon to learn more about MCC's response in the region. Scott Campbell, MCC BC's Advancement Director, and a Volvo enthusiast, starting snapping images of the surprisingly numerous Volvos. "I found these cars' presence in Lebanon a bit jarring. Volvos are typically Western vehicles known for their safety features. They seem out of place in this Eastern country emerging from internal conflicts and a neighbour to countries deeply scarred by ongoing fighting. Yet these cars are resilient. They persist, sometimes damaged, but seemingly miraculously. For me, these cars play a kind of stand-in role for their owners. Bombarded by images of people in need, I see these vehicles as proxies for people whose stories parallel the lives lived in and through these cars."

Scott Campbell's photo exhibit, *Volvos of Lebanon*, was recently featured at the Mennonite Heritage Museum.

Photo from the exhibit, Volvos of Lebanon, by Scott D. Campbell



Photos from the exhibit, Volvos of Lebanon, by Scott D. Campbell

The story behind this collection can be found on page 31.