



# 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



## Christnacht

By Jacob H. Janzen; translated by Julia Born Toews

Noch einmal, Mutter, führ den Jungen,  
Den du getragen und ernährt,  
Dem du das Schlummerlied gesungen  
Und den das Beten du gelehrt;  
Den du geliebt, den du erzogen,  
Den du alleingelassen hast  
Auf dieses Lebens dunklen Wogen,  
In dieses Lebens schwerer Last.  
Schau her, dein Bub is alt und müde;  
Grau ward sein Haupt im Sturm der Zeit.  
Noch einmal, Mutter, sing mein Herz zur Ruhe,  
In stiller Christnacht ... Noch einmal ...  
Bevor in schmäler, dunkler Truhe  
Entschlummern meine Leiden all!

Once again, mother, guide this boy,  
Whom you carried and nourished,  
Whom you hushed with lullabies,  
Whom you taught to pray,  
Whom you cherished and nurtured,  
Whom you abandoned to solitude  
On Life's troubled waters,  
And Life's heavy burden.  
Look here, your lad is old and tired;  
His head has greyed in the storm of time.  
Once again, mother, sing peace into my heart  
This quiet Christmas Eve ... once again ...  
Ere in a dark and narrow place  
All my grief is stilled in deepest sleep!

# Christmas Morning in Einlage

Freely translated by Louise Bergen Price

No one sleeps late on Christmas morning, for carollers come from surrounding Russian villages of Markusowo and Wosnesenka while it's still pitch dark, bringing their *Glückwünsche* (wishes of good luck). They carry a large star with a picture of the Christ child in his cradle. A lantern held behind the star makes the picture glow. After they sing a carol, they are showered with *Gruznikji* (peppermint ammonia cookies) and coins. After one group leaves, another arrives.

Local villagers also come with *Glückwünsche*. Tante *Dicke Saunte* always sings, "*Dies ist die Nacht*" (This Is the Night). And Tante *Ole Therese* throws all the goodies she receives into the same pot, for she says that it all ends up in the same stomach anyway. No one who comes leaves empty-



Germashev. «With a Star». 1916 Source: Wikipedia, "Kolyadka"

handed. The last one to arrive is the policeman, Karandashow, who receives a ruble.

Story from: *Einlage Kitchkas 1789-1943*. Edited by Heinrich Bergen. Bergen, 2009. p. 53.

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## Editorial

At first, the idea of a special bonus Christmas issue of *Roots and Branches* to promote the MHSBC and our periodical seemed a bit daunting. But as we gathered material, excitement took hold. We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it all together!

We are also pleased to announce that Julia Born Toews has joined our editorial team. Welcome, Julia! Glad to have you on board.

Thank you, readers, for your support throughout the year; for your words of encouragement and also for constructive criticism. We wish you all a joyous Christmas season and a blessed New Year.

**Front cover poem:** from De Fehr, et. al. *Harvest: Anthology of Mennonite Writing in Canada*. Winnipeg: Centennial Committee of the Mennonite Historical Society of Manitoba, 1974. p. 180.

**Front cover photograph:** the raspberry sculpture, taken from the window of the MHSBC archives, by Waltrude Nickel Gortzen.

# A Christmas *Gluckwunsch* and a Kiss

Translated by Louise Bergen Price

*Early Christmas morning, around 1900. Hänschen and his older brother, Berend, have received their Christmas gifts: a splendid geometry set with a compass for Hänschen, and a fifteen-jewel watch for his older brother. It has been a good harvest. Both boys are overjoyed and their parents take pleasure in watching them.*

Then Father and Mother sit on wicker chairs across from the guest bed, and now the atmosphere gets a bit solemn.

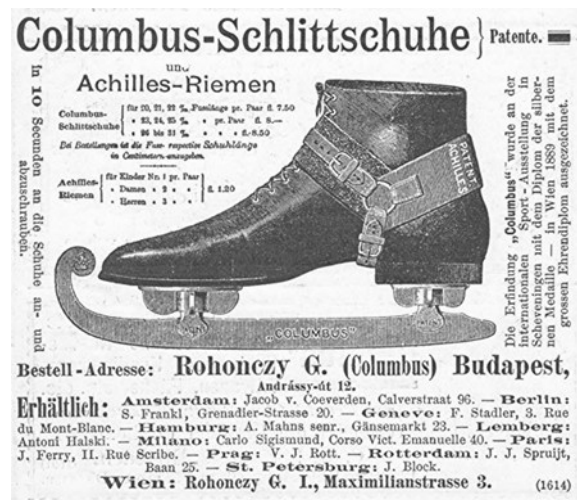
"Well, Hans, have you learned a *Wunsch* for this year?"

Hans folds his hands and recites his poem. It's a long one, and seems to go on forever, but it comes forth clear and without a stammer, and is a joy for the parents to hear. It's not the content that makes them happy, for it goes by so rapidly that one can't actually follow, but whenever it speaks of the love of parent to child, or the other way around, Father nods his head. No, it's not the content, but it's the length of it, and the smooth recitation and that it's their Hans who has accomplished this feat of memory. Finally, with an "Amen," the end is reached. "Amen," repeats Father, and Mother says it too, and nods. And then both Mother and Father receive a kiss. That's tradition, and it's the only kiss of the whole, long year. Berend kisses his parents as well, and thanks them for his watch.

"Well, you two, give each other a kiss today as well," Father says. Hans stares, amazed, and looks at his brother with misgiving: give him a kiss?! That has never happened before. So far, they've gotten along today – quite well, in fact – but a kiss? Then suddenly, Berend takes Hans's face in his hands and smacks a kiss onto his mouth so loud it cracks like a pistol. Well, then Hans doesn't have to worry about what to do anymore. He rubs his sleeve over his mouth. His parents smile, Berend smirks.

Before they sit down to breakfast, all kneel beside their chairs and Father prays out loud. This is what one does on Christmas and New Year's morning. At other times, each prays silently at their bed. Today Father prays out loud, and Hans is amazed that he can do it so well, so devoutly, but in High German ... but it seems strange to hear him speak High German.

From: Arnold Dyck. *Verloren in der Steppe*. Winnipeg, CMBC, 1985, p. 235-237. (First printing, 1944).



1892 Print Ad, G.Rohonczy Columbus Winter Ice Skates, *Schlittschuhe* Printed Advertisement

## Skating in Rosental 1903

Translated by Louise Bergen Price

*Maria Penner, a student at Chortitza's high school for girls, the Mädchenschule, describes the joy of ice skating on a flooded field after Christmas, when the ice was finally strong enough.*

In Rosental, a small stream flooded a broad valley, forming a beautiful shallow lake. What fun it was to fly over the ice's smooth surface with sparkling new steel blades, either the "Columbus" or the "Sneurki." Hoarfrost covered the bare poplars and willows that surrounded the valley; snow glistened in the sun; joyful crowds of young skaters completed the beautiful picture.

The girls usually came out in a group, skates dangling from their arms. It didn't take long for several polite boys from the *Zentralschule* (high school) to approach them on the bank, and, like knights errant, go down on one knee and fasten their skates. Then a courteous bow, the word, "*bitte*" (please) and off they would go, hand in hand, with reddened cheeks and glowing eyes into the crisp winter air. It seems to me that even now I feel that cold air rushing against my face.

From: *Glueckliche, Sonnige Schulzeit; ein Buch fuer Jung und Alt*. Edited by Frau Helene Toews. Niagara Printers: [1948?]. p. 38.

# Christmas in the Brazilian Mountains

Translated by Robert Martens

*Susanne Hamm wrote, quite beautifully, a memoir on her family's flight from post-revolutionary Russia to a sanctuary – of sorts – in the Brazilian mountains. Her account swells with heartbreak, joy, love, and loss. The following excerpt from her memoir describes the family's first Christmas in an alien land.*

The wonderful time of Christmas falls here exactly at the hottest time of the year. We are clearing the land: father, Hans, brother Wanja, Agnes, and I. The tropical sun is scorching. Its blinding rays beat down upon us as we battle the jungle with axe, mattock and sledgehammer. The work is difficult and we are unaccustomed to it. Sweat pours down our bent necks. Frequently, Father has to stop and rest. At the age of 72 he still immerses himself in his work. He doesn't complain, except that occasionally he says to himself, "Who among us could have imagined this!" Indeed, all our hearts are heavy and we ask ourselves, "Will we find our way through?" The people in the valley have told us that the land on the high sierra is very poor, in fact that it's worthless. But we think we can make things work; yes, we will find a way to make a living here.

In the midst of these thoughts, a song drifts our way. Our daughters Edith and Leni are singing "Silent night, holy night" in our hut of sticks and leaves. We pause – I wipe away a furtive tear. Hans notices, and says, "Listen, Susa, we will have a real Christmas. The Christ child will come into our lowly hut. Just now I had the thought that he would gladly enter our hut because it would remind him of his birthplace." And yes, we all knew inwardly that it was time to cast off everything that ties us to this earth, and to raise our gaze to the One who for our sake who would not spare his own son. I fell silent. My heart was stricken with homesickness. ...

It's the day before Christmas Eve. A man, weighed down by a heavy load, is climbing the sierra. And what is

he carrying on his strong shoulders? – it is a Christmas tree, the first in our new home to gladden the hearts of children. They are in need of happiness just as the flowers that reach for the sun; they have been dragged too soon into the severity of life. The man gasping under the weight of the spiky pine is our neighbour Jakob Dueck. After travelling a long way, he still had to climb the mountain, but he's happy, he is anticipating the joy of the children. He himself has little ones. Finally, bathed in sweat and scratched by the sharp needles, he reaches the top.



Painting by J.J. Janzen, from the personal collection of Ron and Julia Toews.

Christmas Eve has arrived. As they do on Sundays, old and young hurry to the long, grey, wooden house. But today, it doesn't seem grey. Love and joy – and the children's sweet hope – have wiped away the dust of everyday life. A mother, arriving late, slips in with her youngest in her arms. Everyone gathers around the tree, decorated and lit up with candles – and around the cheering children. Bags of treats, donated by good-hearted people, are distributed to the incredulous young ones. – "Yes, today your Saviour is born, even here in the jungle!" The joyful voices of children are raised in song: "Oh you joyful, oh you blessed, oh Christmas time of holy grace" – and in the hearts of the

adults, the quiet tones of "Silent night, holy night."

When we arrive home, Hans says to the children, "Stay now in the kitchen a while and behave yourselves quietly. Mother and I wish to be alone. Agnes and Wanja, you must give us a hand." Quickly a suspicious package is pulled from a corner; and a pine bough, decorated with lights and colourful balls, is tied fast to the bed. We laid our gifts around the ornamented little tree. Father sat at the edge of the bed, regarded our comings and goings, smiled, and then said, "And so our hut is witness to another Christmas celebration. That is how it should be." (35-36)

From: Susanna Hamm. *Wie Gott Fuehrt, oder, Aus dem Steppenvolk ein Bergvoelklein*. "How God Leads, or, From a People of the Steppe Emerges a Community in the Mountains" (loosely translated)

# Soft, spicy peppernuts

Submitted by Julia Born Toews

This is a recipe for soft, spicy peppernuts. My family prefers them to the hard kind.

## Ingredients:

- 3 cups flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. each of ground anise, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, vanilla
- ¼ tsp. each of pepper (I prefer white pepper), allspice
- ½ cup shortening
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup milk

Mix in order given. Roll out pieces of dough into pencil thin strips on lightly floured board. Lay parallel strips on board and cut across into pieces the size of hazelnuts. Place close together on cookie sheet. This recipe fills



Rolling out peppernuts. Source: [www.kvalifood.com](http://www.kvalifood.com)

about 2 cookie sheets.

Bake at 425 to 450 degrees for 5 – 8 minutes (depends on how thick they are). Peppernuts are done when they first begin to turn slightly golden in colour.

To cool and keep moist, lay peppernuts between sheets of waxed paper and cover with a towel. When cool, shake in a bag with powdered sugar. Store in a covered container.

Recipe from Norma Jost Voth. *Peppernuts Plain and Fancy*. Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1978. pp. 35 & 41.

## Mummers and Carollers in Jasykowo

Translated by Louise Bergen Price



*Sternsänger* (Star singers),  
Nürnberg woodcut from the  
1700s. Source: Wikipedia.de

On New Year's Eve (*Silvesterabend*), one looked forward to the arrival of mummers with their *Brummtopf*. Accompanied by the drone of their instrument, they sang waggish ditties, wishes for the coming year. This custom has largely been forgotten, but I recall that mummers wished, for the man of the house, a full table with a fried fish on each corner (*ein gedeckter Tisch und auf jeder Ecke ein gebratener Fisch*); and for the woman, a colourful skirt (*bunter Rock*) and a broomstick (*Besenstock*).

On New Year's Day morning, Ukrainian carollers arrived with small satchels of grain. As they sang, they spread handfuls of grain on the floor to the rhythm of the song, a symbolic blessing of the harvest to come.

From: Julius Loewen. *Jasykowo*. p. 26.

According to *The Windmill Turning*, the *Brummtopf* was a "homemade instrument of a cowhide drumhead stretched over the end of a wooden keg. A long horsehair whisk was fastened to the drumhead and when drawn between thumb and forefinger would produce a continuous droning sound."

Victor Carl Friesen. *The Windmill Turning*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1988, p. 60.

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our office at 1818 Clearbrook  
Road, second floor of the  
Mennonite Heritage Museum  
in Abbotsford, BC.**

# The “Miracle of Holy Christmas” in China

Translated by Robert Martens

*The book's title, Ein siebzehnjähriger mennonitischer Leidensweg, itself tells the story. On this journey of sorrow, however, the light of Christmas intrudes somewhere in China.*

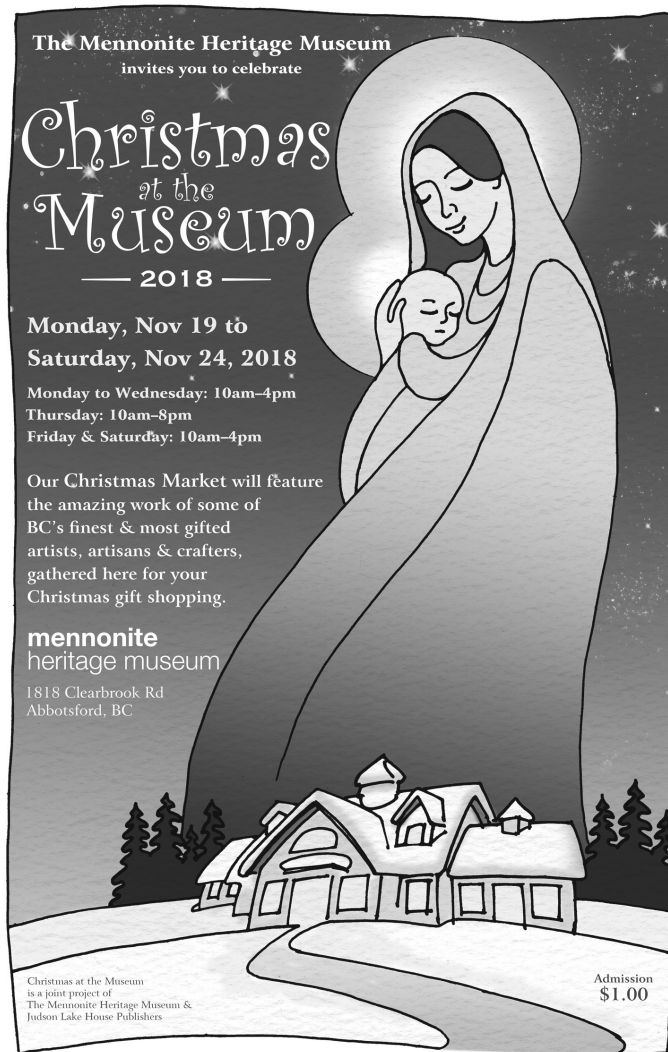
In the evening they arrived at a roadside inn, where they wished to stay the night. When the truck was examined it became clear that it would need extensive repairs that would require a full three days. The group now needed to make themselves as comfortable as they could in the guestroom, through which travellers were constantly moving back and forth. During the night, vermin robbed them of their sleep. But at least they were indoors where it was relatively warm.

The second day of our stay in this place was the first day of Christmas, but how could they celebrate Christmas in this dirty hut? They remembered, however, that it could not have been very clean in the stall in Bethlehem, and that the two people there could not have been especially comforted by the spirit of Christmas while the Lord Jesus was born and laid in a cradle. And just as the shepherds with their flock in the fields were abruptly illuminated by the Holy Night, so a light suddenly filled the hearts of the women and children in this inn, and they could do no other than to sing the Christmas songs of their distant homeland. The miracle of Holy Christmas left them spellbound and happy, though for some a hidden tear of longing for their lost homes ran down their cheeks. How many years had they been homeless!

Sweets, however, which seemed essential to Christmas celebration, were unavailable, but the women recalled that they still had dried apples from Ghulja in their possession. These, then, became the substitute for sweets. (97)

From: Abram J. Loewen. *Immer Weiter nach Osten: Südrussland – China – Kanada – Ein siebzehnjähriger mennonitischer Leidensweg. Ein Tatsachenbericht von Abram J. Loewen.* Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1981.

(Always to the East: South Russia – China – Canada – A Seventeen-year Mennonite Path of Suffering. A Report of Actual Events by Abram J. Loewen)



## Roots and Branches

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**Holiday closure:** MHSBC and the Mennonite Heritage Museum will be closed from Monday, 17 December 2018 to Saturday 12 January 2019 and will re-open on Monday, 14 January 2019.

# Christmas in Paraguay

By Julia Born Toews

While sorting through some files of my parents, Henry C. and Esther Born, I came across a Christmas letter they wrote from Paraguay in 1954. After graduation from Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg, and a three-year teaching stint at the East Chilliwack Bible School, my dad attended Tabor College in Kansas, graduating in 1954. That same year the M.B. Board of General Welfare (later Board of Missions and Services) asked my parents to go to Volendam Colony, Paraguay, to teach in the high school and help with the M.B. Church. The people in this colony were Mennonites, European refugees from World War II. They were not accepted as immigrants by Canada and USA, and had been “settled” with the help of MCC in this subtropical jungle.

Here, travelling was done with horse and buggy rather than cars, illumination at night was with lamps, not electricity, and indoor plumbing was nonexistent. With the reversal of the seasons in the southern hemisphere, even Christmas celebrations were unique, as the letter describes.

I’ve included a photo of that first Christmas church celebration. Have you ever seen such a sad-looking group of children around a Christmas tree! Even the “bags” of goodies on the table don’t elicit any smiles at the moment. I also remember singing “*Leise rieselt der Schnee*” (Softly Falls the Snow) – so odd.

Hello to North America  
Volendam Colony 1  
Dec. 25, 1954

It’s Christmas here in Paraguay and it sure doesn’t seem like it. We have one of the hottest and most sultry days so far. At the S.S. program last nite in the village church the thunder storm and lightning almost disrupted



Volendam MB Church, Village #12. Girls front row left to right: Magdalene Barwich, Julia Born, Louise Penner. Lili Rempel second row on right. Photo: Henry C. Born.

the evening. Everyone became restless, wondering whether to stay or leave for home. The children in their dress up clothes were too hot to enjoy it. The candles on the tree hung limp as soon as they were lit and the branches bent way down before the evening was over. The bags with goodies we had prepared helped to put a spark into the children later.

This afternoon people from another village came over and we spent it outside eating watermelon. Later we all went to neighbors for a dinner of chicken, mandioka and “mousse.” We usually have grapefruit for salad and green papaya as pickles. Every yard has chickens and it’s the staple meat diet here.

In a few days we travel to another colony, Friesland. We have to travel at nite because of the heat. If it doesn’t rain we’ll go by moon light. Should be interesting. It takes 12 hrs. by horse and buggy thro swamp land.

After we get back we’ll spend a week as a family at Porto Mbopicua where we are involved in a children’s camp. We hope to swim & boat in the Paraguay river, but it has piranhas (flesh eating fish), so we have to be cautious. It’s super dark outside and my lamp is getting dimmer. Everyone is asleep by now so I’ll sign off too.

Love,  
Henry & Esther

# November

By Fritz Sen

Jetzt nickt das Leben wieder ein  
Wie Hühner unter Hecken;  
Die mag kein schrilles Falkenschrein  
Aus ihrem Schlummer schrecken.

Der Regen fegt die Fenster blind,  
Die Dinge zu verhüllen;  
Und eingeschlafen ist der Wind,  
Dem alles sonst zu Willen.

Bleib wach, mein Herz, und nick  
nicht ein,  
Wenn auch die Schatten spinnen,  
Und suche heiligen  
Weihnachtsschein  
Tief innen, ja tief innen.

From: Fritz Senn. *Gesammelte Gedichte  
und Prosa*. Winnipeg: CMBC, 1987.  
p.59

## November

by Fritz Senn

translated by Robert Martens

Now life once more is nodding  
Like chickens under hedges,  
And the shrill cry of the falcon  
Can't startle them from their slumber.

The rain sweeps the windows blind  
To conceal the things of this world;  
And the wind has fallen asleep,  
That otherwise roamed at will.

Stay awake, my heart, and don't nod off,  
Even while shadows are spinning.  
And look for the holy light of Christmas  
Deep within, deep within.



*Daddy Fix the Whole in the Sky?* Art: Trevor Wight

Artist Trevor Wight grew up in Abbotsford, where he attended the University College of the Fraser Valley. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Lethbridge, and a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Saskatchewan. Currently, he lives in Abbotsford with his wife, Katherine, and their children, and teaches Art and Physical Education at Yale Secondary. To see more of his work, visit <http://www.trevorwight.com/home.html>