



Roots and Branches

Periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

*“What we have heard and known
we will tell the next generation.”*

Psalm 78



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“Shadow of the Cross,” cemetery in Heritage Park, Mission, B.C., 1996

Photo: Julia M. Toews

Editorial

By Robert Martens

The assimilation of mainstream Mennonites into mainstream society – this has been a hot topic in recent years. Why? Are we nostalgic for a communal past? Are we relieved to leave the encumbrance of tradition behind? And how far have Mennonites actually “assimilated?”

This issue presents a variety of perspectives on this topic. The article on Ted Friesen reveals a man straddling the past, present, and future. Dave Loewen writes on three generations of Mullers, all of whom adapted to the conditions of their time. A Bakerview MB Church bulletin provides a snapshot of the transition from agriculture to entrepreneurship. Vanessa Voth’s novel, reviewed by David Giesbrecht, traces the emigrations of one family from Russia to Paraguay and eventually to a settled life in North America. Finally, Julia Toews’ and Larry Nightingale’s stories approach the past from the perspective of the present, while connecting emotionally to the Mennonite story.

Recently, academic Brian Froese spoke on the post-World War II integration of Mennonites into the Canadian commonality. On 2 June 2019, Marlene Epp and Paul Born will continue that conversation at a Mennonite Historical Society event. Perhaps that further dialogue will cast more light on the Mennonite enigma.

Have you been receiving your membership emails? If you are a current member and you haven't been receiving your emails from us, please contact us at 604-853-6177 or drop us a line at archives@mhsbc.com so that we can make sure you'll get all your information updates throughout the year.

Letter to the editors

Comment on the photos used in Helen Rose Pauls’ report, “Caught in the Middle: Mennonite Boys in Stalin’s and Hitler’s Armies,” *Roots and Branches* Vol. 25/1 (February 2019): 5.

The first photo has the caption: “Members of a Mennonite *Waffen-SS* squadron in Ukraine’s Molotschna colony, 1943. Source: Harry Loewen, ed., *Long Road to Freedom: Mennonites Escape the Land of Suffering*.” This caption is taken from Ben Goossen’s blog “Mennonites and the Holocaust: An Introduction,” in *Anabaptist Historians* for

7 February 2018, where the caption reads: “Members of a Mennonite *Waffen-SS* squadron in Ukraine’s Molotschna colony, 1943. Credit: Harry Loewen, ed., *Long Road to Freedom: Mennonites Escape the Land of Suffering* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2000): 106.”

The caption – like much of Ben Goossen’s “historical” writing – is completely false and has been “modified” from the original to meet Ben’s preconceived notions. In Harry Loewen’s original 2000 publication, the caption on page 106 actually reads: “Mennonite young men enlisted in the German army (*Reiterschwadron*), Southern Ukraine 1943.”

This caption is also not true – it identifies the young men as members of the *Reiterschwadron* – a military unit based in the Molochna colony. When I received my personal copy of the book I informed Dr. Loewen about the error in the caption, but at least 2000 books had been printed and distributed and there was no possibility of correcting this and several other errors.

In fact this photo was taken near Zaporozhe in the summer of 1943 and pictures young men from the various Khortitsa Colony villages who were enlisted to serve as a *Selbstschutz*, protecting retreating Mennonite and other German civilians on the long trek west to Germany. I know this for a fact, because my father was one of the young men pictured in the photo.

On 12 June 1943, at the age of eighteen, my father and many young men from the various Khortitsa villages were drafted into the German army. His unit, however, was not part of the regular army, but a force of young Mennonite men formed to serve as a paramilitary *Selbstschutz*, protecting retreating Mennonite and other German civilians on the long trek. The young men (boys) were given two to three months of training in Zaporozhe. The commanders of the unit were two SS officers from Hitler’s own SS *Leibstandarte* (Hitler’s personal body guard division) – *Unterscharführer* Wunder and Fuchs.

Training in the heat of summer was physically grueling and on most days they would return to their barracks dripping in sweat. Father recalled that one of the drill leader’s favourite lines was “*Achten Sie auf den Daumen!*” (“Pay attention to my thumb!”) After the initial training period, father stayed on and was assigned duties as *Unterführer* (junior officer), in charge of training new recruits. The company seen in the photo was a motorized division, not a “*Reiterschwadron*”; they wore dark grey-green *Waffen-SS* uniforms, but without swastikas, rank or insignia.

In September 1943, as the Red Army advanced westward, Father's company, commanded by an *Oberscharführer* Frels, was ordered to assist in the evacuation of the Molochna villages. They arrived in Halbstadt early in September, but the Red Army was so close that within three days they had to retreat and flee back to Khortitsa. Father was in charge of the *Feldküche* – the supply truck carrying food, drinks and cigarettes. He had a chef and a driver under his command. The rest of the company travelled on horse-drawn wagons. On the retreat, the heavily loaded truck became stuck on the muddy dirt roads. While Father and his two companions struggled to free their vehicle, the rest of the company proceeded to Nikopol. By the time they had extracted the truck from the mud, they had lost contact with their company.

The company was deployed in Nikopol. According to Peter Krahn, their task was supervising an orderly evacuation of German residents from the Molochna settlements, setting up supply depots along the way, and herding livestock. They were armed only with rifles, no automatic weapons or artillery. After over one-and-a-half months, the unit eventually ended up in the Polish town of Borki Wilki, or Waldhorst, near Litzmannstadt (Łódź). When they arrived, they were greeted by Father and his two companions.

When they had been unable to find their company in Khortitsa, they had finally loaded the supply truck onto a train and headed in a westerly direction, hoping to meet up with them along the way. Meanwhile, the company had marched for weeks to Poland with no provisions, and had to confiscate or beg for supplies along the way. They also had to defend the Trek against Ukrainian partisans.

The commanding general was furious with Father and his companions, and accused all three of desertion. They were locked up in a small cell in the corner of the bunker in which the rest of the unit was staying, and placed on a starvation diet. Other members of the unit were forbidden to speak with the prisoners. They would probably have starved, if Peter Krahn (who was also an *Unterführer*) and other friends had not smuggled in small amounts of food each night.

Father and his companions were sentenced to be shot, but before the sentence could be carried out, their commanding general was himself demoted because of certain "indiscretions" during the retreat. Their company commander, *Unterscharführer* Wunder, was also reassigned to the Hungarian front

near Budapest.

Threatened by the rapid advance of Russian armies, the whole camp was hastily abandoned, and the three condemned men were released in early March 1944.

The *Selbstschutz* unit had accomplished its mission of accompanying the refugees to safety and most of the men were discharged from further duty. Father was granted citizenship in the German Reich on 27 July 1944 and was allowed to rejoin his parents and siblings, who had ended up in a refugee camp at Johannsdorf in Upper Silesia. Here father found a job as *Waldarbeiter* (forestry worker) for the summer and fall months.

Peter Letkemann, Winnipeg

Upcoming Events

Mennonite Comedian Matt Falk

Know any good Mennonite jokes? Matt Falk does. He'll be appearing at the Abbotsford Arts Centre at 7 pm, Saturday, October 5, 2019. Some tickets have already been sold, so buy yours now! Available for \$35 at the Mennonite Historical Society office at 1818 Clearbrook Road. Further info on the MHSBC website. Phone 603-853-6177 or email archives@mhsbc.com

Living with Loss and Finding Belonging: The Stories of Postwar Mennonite Refugees

Buy Tickets in Advance for *FASPA \$15
 Tickets can be purchased by visiting the MHSBC Reception Desk, Floor 2 at 1818 Clearbrook Road, by calling 604-853-6177 or PayPal: see our website www.mhsbc.com ("A "Faspa" is a light meal.)

CELEBRATION EVENT @6PM

Paul & Marlene's Books Available for Purchase!
 All proceeds from the sale of the books along with the special offering will be going to MCC Refugee Relief Work / Abbotsford Community Services
 CALL 604-853-6177 TO FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN SPONSOR THIS EVENT!
 Feature Display: Selected list of the Exhibit Along the Road to Freedom by Ray Binks

Dr. Marlene Epp

Paul Born

Presentation (FREE) at 2:30pm
Faspa (\$15.00) at 4:30pm
Celebration (FREE) at 6:00pm

Sunday, June 2, 2019
King Road MB Church
32068 King Rd, Abbotsford, BC

The Legacy of Ted Friesen (1920-2016)

By Robert Martens

Near the end of his memoir published in 2003, Ted Friesen writes, “I have asked myself, what impact have I made on the community around me, and society? I have no special gifts” (179). In reality, his impact was quite remarkable. Friesen was a man of limited education who was born and died in the small town of Altona, Manitoba, and yet blossomed into a figure of major importance in the Canadian Mennonite community. For some, he may be best remembered for his connection with D. W. Friesen & Sons, one of the largest printing firms in the country. This quietly modest man, however, also played prominent roles in Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC), the Mennonite church both locally and nationally, and the publication of *The Canadian Mennonite*. Somehow, Ted Friesen managed to straddle the line between Mennonite traditionalism and Canadian acculturation; he both loved the old and accommodated to the new. He was a man of “special gifts.”

Roots

Ted, the sixth of seven children, was the son of *Kanadier* parents, David W. Friesen and Sarah Klippenstein Striemer, both born in Manitoba. They were committed conservative Mennonites who were deeply supportive of their Bergthaler congregation in Altona. D.W. Friesen tried farming near Altona but was unsuited to the rural life; he was one of those Mennonites who felt the need to spread their wings. In 1905 he opened a Massey-Harris farm implement dealership in Altona. That failed, but undeterred, D.W. started a confectionary store in the town and was made postmaster in 1907. In the 1920s and 1930s a book shop and printery were added to his small business; these were to grow into the massive printing business, D. W. Friesen & Sons (later Friesens Corporation).

Like many Mennonite entrepreneurs of the time, however, D.W. seemed unwilling to expand his business beyond a certain point. Ted Friesen recalls, “He had three months of English education.... He was the postmaster, he had the telephone office, and he owned a general store. A growing family. The only deacon in the church, which in those days was a considerable amount of work. And I think the fact that he was, that he had so

many things that he was involved in, there was no time for expansion on his part” (qtd in Thiessen 183).

Despite a poor education, D.W. assembled his own personal library on Mennonite history, theology and literature, and helped found the Mennonite Historical Society of Manitoba. These interests were to have a great influence on his son Ted.

Growing up in Altona

According to his accounts, Ted Friesen enjoyed his rather insular childhood in Altona. He was influenced throughout his lifetime by his parents’ traditionalist Mennonite values: the hard work and honesty of his father, the love and dedication of his mother. “Our modes of behaviour,” he writes, “were pretty well governed by the social mores of the community. We accepted those without question.... Mine was a stable family in a stable community” (7). Ted grew up to resent the overly “puritan outlook” of his Mennonite church and town, yet into old age remained grateful for his upbringing. He writes, “I have a lot of nostalgia for the world of yesterday, for the world of the 1920s. No doubt some of it is wishful thinking.... It was a narrower world, but for that reason experiences were more intense” (13). And he never lost his love for Mennonite ethnic cooking.

In 1936 Ted Friesen joined the family business. “What led the Friesen family to consider branching out?” he asks. “...Originally the primary focus of such business ventures was the family and the community. They provided for the needs of people whose world was circumscribed by the boundaries of the community. The Friesen boys had made contact with the world outside.... But they also had an opportunity to enter this world through business contacts, and ultimately expansion” (20).

The 1940s were a time of intense activity for the Friesen family. During World War II, two of the Friesen sons enlisted in the Canadian armed forces, and one saw action. Ted abided by the traditional Mennonite teaching of nonresistance and refused to serve in the military. Meanwhile, he had met Linda (Linie) Krahn. They married and raised three sons; a daughter died at childbirth. (One of the sons, Paul, was born with Rh disease; another son, Eric, became a well-known voice on CBC Radio.)

During this time, Ted Friesen’s interest in Mennonite history was growing. He watched with fascination as the Mennonite Historical Society of Manitoba developed by the year; its first publication was *Woher? Wohin? Mennoniten* (From Where? Where to? Mennonites), authored by Paul Schaeffer. Meanwhile, Ted and Linie

were travelling, reading, and expanding their intellectual horizons, even as they chose to stay in small-town Altona.

The 1950s

In 1952 D.W. Friesen died.

“My own relationship with father can best be described as complex,” writes Ted Friesen.

“I rebelled against his puritan lifestyle. He did not like that, and if he did not tell me so in

words, I knew instinctively

what he thought of my recalci-

trant stance ... and yet we had common interests. My growing interest in Mennonite history pleased him. I was supportive of his work both in business and in the church. I liked his sense of fairness towards his family and others, his advice to his children to live responsibly, to balance privilege with obligation. Although I knew he was right in setting high standards, I rebelled because it hampered a hedonistic lifestyle. In spite of that I loved my father, and had a very high regard for him. That expressed itself more after his death” (46).

In 1951, a year before D.W.’s death, three brothers, Dave, Ray, and Ted, had bought out their father’s share of the business. D. W. Friesen & Sons, as it was now known, was about to expand in ways their father could not have foreseen – or perhaps even wished. The three brothers would successfully direct the firm until the late 1980s.

During this decade, Ted Friesen was moving into positions of service to church and community. He first sat on the Board of Christian Service, a function of the General Conference Mennonite Church of Canada. He then served on the Canadian Mennonite Relief Committee, a regional institution representing conservative Manitoba Mennonite churches. Ted writes that he was a “very junior member of this committee” (52), but after it merged with MCC Canada in 1963, he served on MCC’s executive committee from 1964-1977. During these years when he was serving in positions of authority, Ted was arguing for a greater emphasis on issues of peace.

Change and identity

Mennonite churches in Canada were witnessing rapid social change and were compelled to deal with it. In 1962, Ted Friesen, recognizing the need for an English-



Friesens Corporation in Altona during the early years. It is employee-owned, and specializes in hardcover books and yearbooks. Photo: www.friesens.com

speaking congregation, was among those who left the Bergthaler Church and helped create a new one, Altona Mennonite. “What sort of impact has AMC had for Altona, as well as for the large scene in our provincial and national conferences?” writes Friesen. “I would say that we have been part of the acculturation process of Mennonites. We have helped the church move from ‘The Quiet in the Land’ to become part of a larger society, the story of Mennonite society in the 20th century” (70). Ted Friesen worked as moderator of Altona Mennonite Church for the following seventeen years.

Among those leaving the Bergthaler congregation for the new church in Altona was a young scholar, Frank H. Epp. In 1968 the Manitoba and Ontario Mennonite Historical Societies met with the intention of launching an ambitious publishing project. The idea, to write a comprehensive history of Mennonites in Canada, was the brainchild of Winfield Fretz (an American academic, administrator, and researcher), Ted Friesen, and Frank Epp. These meetings led to the formation of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada; Friesen sat on its executive from 1968 to 1996, spending the last decade of that time as president. Frank Epp went to work on the history project, publishing Volume I of *Mennonites in Canada* in 1974 and Volume II in 1982. Just as Epp was beginning Volume III, he died. Ted Regehr, well-known as a skilled historian, consented to finish the third volume. There was a problem, however: Regehr was serving at the time as president of the Mennonite Historical Society and would have to step down in order to take on the project. At this point Ted Friesen stepped in and accepted the presidency.

A new Mennonite paper

In 1953, the three Friesen brothers living in Altona launched a new periodical for Mennonites in Canada. *The Canadian Mennonite*, wrote Ted in the first issue, would face difficulties: "...[S]uch a periodical will not be a financially profitable exercise, but we pray that it will be a worthwhile service to our Mennonite brethren everywhere" (qtd in Loewen Reimer CM 21). Many years later, Friesen would look back on the challenges faced by the periodical: "We became aware of the immensity of the task before us. The church was changing. It was a period of flux, with the old trying to maintain the status quo and the new looking for change to meet the needs of the times" (qtd in Loewen Reimer CM 21).

Frank Epp, just 24 at the time, was chosen as the first editor of *The Canadian Mennonite*. In that role he was an occasional sparkplug for controversy. The Friesen press published the periodical only until 1962 but continued to print the magazine until 1970, when *The Canadian Mennonite* ceased publication. It was soon revived, however, in a different form and continues to be published to this day.

Retirement

In 1986 Ted and Dave Friesen retired from business. For Ted, it was an active retirement. He followed some of his more casual interests, for example, classical music, world travel with his wife, and Low German literature. But he also did some research and writing, co-authoring *Altona: A Pictorial History* and co-editing *Memories of Grigorievka*. Some of this work was likely done in the honorary office at Friesens given him upon his retirement (the other brothers received the same gift). Ted Friesen died in February of 2016.

Friesen was known as gentle and conciliatory, a good listener. He was also a keen observer of social change. At his retirement party, he delivered a speech in which he said, "In our history and tradition, community has not only been important, but absolutely essential to our survival as a distinct group. Our ancestors emigrated as communities, not as individuals. That placed the welfare of the community on a very high plane. Now, for myself, as I am sure for many of you, there are several kinds of communi-

ty. There is the community of a particular area such as Altona. Here we have an interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common location. Then there is a community of like minds and interests. That community is not necessarily located in a given area. That interaction comes through the mind and the spirit. Both communities are not necessarily autonomous or self-contained. They should complement each other. More than that, they should enrich each other" (Friesen 90).

Afterword #1: Friesens Corporation

Janis Thiessen, currently a professor of history at the University of Winnipeg, has argued that the Mennonite work ethic differs from the so-called Protestant ethic (a term coined by German sociologist Max Weber). The Protestant ethic, she writes, affirms that an individual's success in business is a sign of God's blessing; on the other hand, "the Mennonite work ethic stresses collective effort as evidence of one's relationship with God" (182). In other words, Thiessen is speculating that Mennonites stress work as something that is done in community. D.W. Friesen & Sons, Thiessen writes, is an example of this.

The firm was clearly established and intended as a family business rooted in its community – Mennonite Altona. Two years after Dave Friesen bought a press in 1933, he hired his cousin, D.G. Friesen, who soon was playing a prominent role in the company. (Incidentally,



The first MCC Canada Executive Committee in 1963. Standing L-R: Ted E. Friesen, E.J. Swalm, Harvey Plett. Seated L-R: Newton Gingrich, David P. Neufeld, C.J. Rempel. Photo: Gameo

Dave had planned on leaving Altona. He remained after his father, D.W., bought him a car so that Dave could sell school supplies in the surrounding area.) Technology at first was exceedingly primitive. D.G. Friesen later recounted, “I remember one job we did, it was an arithmetic book. And we had to, we set up two pages, and then we had to disassemble the copy, the type, the letters, put them into drawers, and set up two new pages. And that’s how we did the printing of a hundred arithmetic books for the school” (qtd in Thiessen 184).

A major reason for the success of D.W. Friesen & Sons was the company’s willingness to upgrade to the highest possible technology. Another was that the firm had a potential labour force of young small-town people who needed a job. But Friesen also succeeded, writes Janis Thiessen, because it so skilfully managed its employees with a “paternalistic” approach that defined them as a working community with a common cause. She quotes Ted Regehr as stating that the firm was run “much as the head of a family farm expected every member to contribute to the success of the farm and then to be rewarded as the head of the household saw fit” (186). The Friesens’ paternalistic approach ensured good pay and benefits, thus warding off the attractiveness of labour unions. The response by employees, Thiessen writes, was an attitude of “deference,” a commitment to working together hard and honestly for the good of the firm. Deference, though, she insists, is not all humility – it can be associated with a strong sense of self-esteem.

In the 1940s, Mennonite businesses were flourishing, often basing themselves on a strong sense of “family.” Within the context of Altona’s conservative culture, obedience and hard work came naturally to Friesens employees. There was little conflict during the earlier years in the workplace. Friesens facilitated employee bonding by sponsoring sports events, arranging banquets, and publishing an in-house newsletter. In an official company history, Ted Friesen wrote that his father D. W. Friesen lived in a place where “[h]ard work, plain living, conforming to the religious and social community, were not only expectations but necessities.” These virtues were to be “renewed and magnified” within the Friesens firm – and within the lives of the three brothers who ran it (qtd in Thiessen 186). Friesens as a company itself exemplified these values in its great generosity to the town

of Altona; the public library was largely a result of Friesens’ largesse.

In the late 1960s, relationships within the firm became less personal. Conflicts in the workplace increased, but trade union organizers failed to find a foothold at Friesens in the early 1970s. The company grew rapidly in the 1980s and was restructured, as Dave Friesen became chair of the board, Ray Friesen, the company president, and Ted remained in his role as secretary-treasurer. Nearly the entire management retired or moved on in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Friesens Corporation was now too large to be run “paternalistically.” Isby Bergen, a long-time employee said, “With a bigger staff, that changes things. I guess it’s like a family, when you’re small you’re very close.... But I still feel we – my goodness, I always say ‘we’ and it’s not ‘we’ anymore” (qtd in Thiessen 188).



Ted Friesen. Photo: Gameo

Afterword #2: The Pacifist Who Went to War

In 2002, David Neufeld directed a National Film Board documentary based largely on interviews with brothers Ted and John Friesen. As so often happened during World War II, Mennonite families were split over the issue of nonresistance. John Friesen chose to enlist in the Canadian armed forces and continued to be proud of his involvement. Ted Friesen felt strongly that he must refuse military service. The two brothers, however, remained very close. In the film, Ted says, “How did I feel about my brother enlisting? ... We felt affection for each other.... I don’t think it affected our relationship in any way.”

The Mobilization Act of 1940 required all eligible men to register for the military. The promises of exemption made by the federal government to Mennonite immigrants in the 1870s were discarded. Many young Mennonites entered alternative service as conscientious objectors. John Friesen, though, decided that he owed a debt of gratitude to his country and enlisted in the air force. “We had a last dinner, a last supper,” he says in the film, “I had let the family down.” During the war, John was nearly killed during a bombing mission. Ted stayed home. “To a degree we gave our support,” he says in the documentary, “I sold war bonds.”

John remarks in the film that he had grown up on the “left,” moved to the centre, and eventually settled on the “right,” deciding that pacifism was the wrong choice.

Attracted by the “community” of Winnipeg, he left Altona early and eventually became “the pacifist who went to war” – the title of the documentary. He never regretted that decision. Yet, in the film he states that “there is a sense of heroism about conscientious objection.”

John did not return home to a hero’s welcome. “That was one of the tragedies of the post world war period,” says Ted in the film, “that the church didn’t accept returned servicemen.” This church intolerance did not alter his views on war and peace. In *The Pacifist Who Went to War*, Ted Friesen quietly but strongly defends the principle of nonresistance: “Some churches, I have been told, have never had a pacifist sermon.... How can that be? ... It’s supposed to be a central tenet of our faith.... I am pessimistic.... I feel that Mennonites have assimilated to such a degree ... that this particular stance of pacifism ... is not something they feel they can come to terms with.”

The Pacifist Who Went to War can be viewed in its entirety online, and is also occasionally screened at the Mennonite Heritage Museum.

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From the archives: Bakerview MB Church bulletin, July 11, 1965

Introduced by Robert Martens

By the 1960s, the Clearbrook Mennonite Brethren Church had grown substantially, even though its services were still being conducted in the German language. In fact, it had grown so large that the church edifice was no longer adequate, and the membership mulled over plans for a daughter church. A decision was made: when at least 75 members were willing to form a new congregation, an organizational meeting to discuss a daughter church would be called. On March 2, 1965, Pastor Henry Thielman met with 88 individuals committed to leaving Clearbrook MB. The mother church donated \$15,000 to the establishment of a new congregation, which took on the name of Bakerview Mennonite Brethren Church.

Of course, the growth of Clearbrook MB was only one factor in the founding of a daughter church. The times were changing: many in the congregation felt strongly that the German language no longer met the needs of an assimilating Mennonite ethnic group. The young were frequently no longer conversant in German. For many, German seemed to be the language of the Mennonite past – the language of an insular ethnic group – and they believed that it was time to move on. The cultural issues of adaptation to mainstream Canadian society were thorny and controversial. Older members of Clearbrook MB might have felt abandoned or betrayed by the young, while the new generation may have felt embarrassed by what they perceived as old-fashioned and restrictive.

The congregations of Clearbrook and Bakerview celebrated a last communion together, after which the daughter church moved on, conducting its services in the nearby Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute (today, Columbia Bible College). David H. Neumann was elected leader of the new group. The first service was held in April of 1965, with a number of members of South Abbotsford Mennonite Brethren Church joining the new group. Certainly, language and issues of cultural adaptation would have been issues for these individuals as well.

Bakerview MB seemed to fill a need in the Fraser Valley, and it grew rapidly. By the close of 1965, a new church sanctuary had been built and was dedicated early in the following year. The original 103-member congregation grew to 431 by the mid-1970s. The church became well-known for the talents of its musicians and academics, and for some was regarded as a

centre for Mennonite thinking in the Fraser Valley.

In 2015, forty years after its founding, Bakerview witnessed a split that saw about 75 members leave to form a new congregation, Valley CrossWay Church.

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The Bakerview MB bulletin for July 11, 1965 shows that D.H. Neumann delivered the morning sermon and that an offering was taken for foreign missions. A communion service was scheduled for that evening, at which ten new members were received into the fellowship. More interesting, perhaps, is number six of the announcements which were printed on page 2 (excerpted below). Clearly, the Mennonite community of Bakerview was still struggling to adapt to new conditions of assimilation and urbanization. The rules for determining of church dues cling to traditional customs: property and wealth are to be evaluated, and dues will be based on that evaluation. Listed sources of income indicate that farming may still have been prevalent in the community; that would not last long, as the young went on to higher education and forsook their farming background.

This bulletin is contained in the Bakerview fonds in the MHSBC archives. (A fonds is an aggregation of documents that originate from the same source – *Wikipedia*.)

Announcements

1. Communion service....7 p.m.
2. Church council meets with M.E.I. Board on Tuesday, 8 p.m. at the M.E.I.
3. Prayer meeting, Wednesday 7:30.
4. Constitutions: The new B.C. Constitutions are printed and may be purchased by anyone interested. Please contact Br. J. Rempel.
5. Receipts for donations: All receipts for donations will be issued annually unless otherwise requested by donor.
6. Giving: It was the decision of our church at its founding to follow the system of giving as we had done in the mother church until such time when we shall see fit to change the rules. Hence we have the Rules for Determining of Church Dues

- a. The following sources shall be considered as income:
1. All sold produce and goods (farmers and business)
 2. All sold animals and birds (farmers)
 3. Wages and custom work, with truck and tractor etc.

4. Commissions and houses of all kinds
5. Family allowance, pensions, unemployment insurance and inheritance.
6. Rent for farm, houses, and businesses
7. Interest on loans, and shares

Note: Refunds on shares or property sold will not be regarded as income.

- b. As expenditures the following items:
1. Feed, fertilizer, chicks, wages, veterinarian, custom work, gas and oil, municipal taxes (for farmers only)
 2. Interest of [sic] borrowed money, rent, cost of stock, wages, insurance for business (for business only)
- c. Wage earners and pensioners who have no other source of income, subtract 25% from gross income and pay 6% on balance.

Source:

Klix, Waylon and Hugo Friesen. "Bakerview Mennonite Brethren Church (Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 2016. www.gameo.org



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Sunday, June 2, 2019

**King Road MB Church
32068 King Rd, Abbotsford, BC**



Join Us:

**Presentation (FREE) at 2:30pm
Faspa (\$15.00) at 4:30pm
Celebration (FREE) at 6:00pm**

Private Property (A Trespass of Time)

By Larry Nightingale

The draining of Sumas Lake in 1924 opened a vast tract of new farmland. The Canadian Hop Company purchased 600 acres in 1926 and by 1927 the first crops were being harvested. This company was formed when Henry Norton Ord, who had gained experience in Horst's American hop yard operations, joined forces with Thomas Livesley and Hugo Loewi, to create the company. Ord became the managing partner. Ord eventually split with his partners in the mid 30s and went on his own way establishing a second hop yard on Sumas Prairie and yards in Kamloops. Mildew was apparently introduced into Sardis in the mid 1930s and this may have prompted Ord to move to the dryer interior region. Upon his death, his wife who was an astute business person in her own right, operated the business for another couple of years until 1957 when she sold her land to John I. Haas Hop Company. (www.chilliwackmuseum.ca)

The Ords built a home on Majuba Hill above Yarrow, BC. For decades, area Mennonites earned cash working for the Ords or other hop yard establishments – which were, at the time, some of the largest on the globe. (Robert Martens)

Ours was a happy trespass that day – a few short years ago. My sister, her husband, and myself relieved and relaxed entering gated property for having received assent from the new landowner (a stranger to us) through a mutual friend. So the writ large bold signage, nailed to both gate-side evergreen and the great pillared house's front door, wasn't shouting at us, held no sway. Upon entry, us skirting the double-chain padlocked old familiar great gate through a tangle of undergrowth and brambles, time slowed dramatically and beautifully took wing – lifting us into quite another zone altogether. A space somehow seemingly shrunk yet expanding, smudged yet shining, us there on the forested hillside's Ord family estate, where countless considered steps later we were astonished to discover what early afternoon hours had passed while we'd toured through the old grounds. Lawns rudely skinned, hedges uprooted all round the mounded yard and the sagging mossy-eaves old mansion. As if at the

entrance to that once grand house time both slowed to a standstill and flew and space itself narrowed yet opened wide – all perceptually somehow one and the same.

I had last visited the dear old place on the thick-wooded hill above our childhood's hometown village nearly a quarter-century ago. Majuba Hill, alongside little Yarrow. After all the work the local (as it turned out interim) owners had undertaken those hopeful years ago with their at-first ambitious but finally failed vintage-quality renovations, I was surprised to discover what haunting remnants of the old original things remained still telltale among the fallen bric-a-brac, whispering to me back and forth to and from the very first owners, our long-lost annual summer residents, the long departed but locally still oft referenced Ords. Items here now underfoot, scattered wildly random, were like scribbled signatures of that American family's years of close connection with the place; beginning with the early decades of last century (in the 1920s when the magnificent forest lot on the acquired fifty-five acres was first landscaped and built for a well-to-do couple of newlyweds – for young Henry and Helen's north-of-border honeymoon get-away) and especially from the later time of their ever mysteriously troubled son Jonathan (John) Winthorpe Huntington Halliday Ord. I would have thought all traces of that to be long gone to dust, rust, moth, and ruin. Or lost to hill-billy vandalism and bold theft, if not the already hovering wrecking ball.

Note: the aforementioned interim owners, H. & I. Peters, latter-day Majuba Hill neighbourhood poultry farmers, had initially upon purchasing (circa 2000, direct from and paid in cash to Edmund Ord – he the original family's sole surviving son) intended to renovate and faithfully restore the house and to that end had toured the Ord family's several other California mansions with Edmund O. to get intel on authentic era fixtures and furnishings – e.g., vintage chandeliers, doorknobs, air-duct grates and the like, and had actually begun this work in earnest; some rooms already painted in fact, and grandly named The Emerald Room, and The Amethyst Room, and had already had the antiquated colossal furnace/heating system extricated. But, it all came to naught, alas – the Peters indicating their young adult children weren't keen for long-term residence, but based on other conversations with them I'd venture to suggest perhaps a mix of additional private reasons and concerns out of their control. There were indeed constantly recurring break-ins and thefts – which, as they put it, on the long run also “stole their enthusiasm.” And there were per-

sonal health considerations as well – bodies wearing down. And an additional problem as the project dragged on possibly in trying to courageously meet and please current building code standards. I was told that the current owner, Mr. J. Neels, originally too envisioned to save the house and live in it, but came up against insurmountable legal obstacles and in the end indeed had to bring in the bulldozers and wrecking crew.

Though we visited on a clear mid-summer day, toward high noon – in broad daylight, it was both blinding and illuminating to take those old once-familiar narrow stairs down, down, down into that now electrical wire-stripped yet somehow still electric darkness (though even back when the place was live-volt and full-powered accessible it had always seemed several shades too dark there in the basement) so to peer through the musty dim length of it now. In sweeping criss-cross beams from our trio of hand-held flashlights, past the grand dust-cloaked pantry still loaded with shelves of century-old hand-jarred preserves and perhaps “home remedies” – many now no doubt laboratories of unintended biochemistry. Some dusty quarts and half-gallon jars and tint-glass bottles so old their contents, deadly or benign, were but so much sludge sediment at bottom of a clear faint-tinted rose or amber liquid, where others more curious and/or brave than I, among the salvagers and wrecking crew found some to claim for alternative use or display – the original vacuum seals having held, uncompromised.

And so on from the ancient pantry then to discover, further in, that musty cool basement’s once impenetrable vault – its outer door recently blown open and as well its once-secret concrete safe standing ajar. In all the years of my family’s working association with the place I’d never had access here, although of course necessarily frequenting the basement, hauling the rustic treasure of our garden tools and wheelbarrow and vintage mowers in and out, labouring at a poor man’s wage. In my youth I begrudged having to spend summer Saturdays toiling there. Sweat dripping from our brows and noses – my grunting aching muscle-strained parents, my sister, and my scowling self. The folks well underpaid (50 cents per hour) for

their year-round time and labour on behalf of the grand estate and its sole long-term resident, that poor peculiar recluse John – one of that wealthy family’s twin son heirs.

In my mind I still see him in his middle years, the lanky loner, an animated abstract spectral shroud of a man striding through the scorching August heat, the committed life-long shunner of bathtubs and/or shower stalls, the seeming grand heir of poor hygiene, his rotting teeth crudely filed down with a common garden hoe file, him wearing layer upon bulky layer of ratty grey clothing, a human soul imprisoned somewhere deep inside there – body and mind. But then other times engaging, with fine mental agility and wan half-smile and his laughing grey-green eyes would break through all that and halfway charm us. As I matured through my youth I came to appreciate the man. And that too is a part of all what is still wound and braided into my fond but complicated feelings – my questioning thoughts of the place, and him, and them – all, alive in one expansive shining vault of memory.

As it was, another space there in that multi-chambered place, up on the sun-streamed main floor, was also never accessible to us even during the early years when our muttering John was sometimes away for a welcome spell. That secret enclosure was his sleeping quarters. Usually during our damp snowy Canadian winter months was when he would annually travel south, at a crawling 30 mph, steady all the way, in his beat up ’50s-model Chevy pick-up truck with the dent and cockeyed headlight (from when he hit a Vedder Mt. deer), off to his high society kin’s native California for a seasonal turn. And, once arrived there, opted out of any of their late 18th century antebellum-style haunts – his mansions of choice, bunking rather in the labourers’ common quarters on the land. This had been his habit before adopting, straight through his later years, the (to us house-and-grounds caretakers) frustrating habit of remaining here in the Pacific Northwest year round. Sometimes holing up in this white-pillared northern place year upon year – till the stretch of years’ dotted line turned solid ... and the man never again left.

We never, even when we were afforded our rare chances – during my lifetime anyway – ventured into



Henry Ord picking hops along with another picker. Photo source: http://www.yarrowbc.ca/settlers/settlers1946_55.html

that nailed closed secret room, just off the antiquated kitchen, where solitary John bunked and hunkered down. His inner storm-cloud-black sanctuary (his, so to speak, own, body and soul's impenetrable vault within a vault) kept barricaded from us and sometimes from himself I must believe. An extreme privacy which we grudgingly respected (what choice did we have?) though we had been handed master-keys, as the long-time hires (most decidedly not heirs!) tasked as keepers to clean and maintain, outside and in, and kindly see after him, though he'd ongoing play his psychological games of hide-and-seek, and switch the locks at will on anything and everything at any time.

Such work rarely was easy or straightforward to accomplish, what with our poor rich man's mercurial sometimes-outright startling ways and sometimes willful and intimidating interference. More often than not he truly was, all said and done, exasperating. There was the time he took a sledgehammer to a right handsome new toilet we'd lugged in and were to properly install next morning, overnight rendering it but a pile of sparkly white dust and jagged chunks of porcelain. He didn't explain. It was surmised this and other such acts came from his deep dark well of ongoing paranoia that his family had designs on or plans for the place – in his suspicious mind those being improvements and arrangements that then wouldn't anymore include or accommodate him there, and so expel him from his dusty palace. With his sledgehammer as with his chains and padlocks he was marking his territory and staking his claim. Seeking shelter and security and a sense of place and home like any misplaced soul.

Such attitudes and actions, justifiable or not, were indeed exasperating – but I admit to some begrudging respect for him for even this. My then early adolescent (and perhaps naïve) sensibilities respected that he lived not by means of and cared not for all the filthy lucre, a rich man's flimsy fleeting tinsel – wealth and prestige – and not certainly for the likes of the original Gainsborough and Lawrence of which among others had been hung exact-sized replicas – *The Blue Boy* and *Pinkie* – hung on those Majuba Hill summerhouse walls. All this he spoke of, it seemed to me, from within some miserly, constricted, conflicted, multifaceted, monumental struggle, articulated with equal parts pride and disdain. (And opinionated as I was I knew I shared that disdain at least for those particular pieces – though their ornate frames were magnificent!) All this even as I wondered at his strange “squandering,” that is, the ignored but yet some-

way not quite ever ignored inheritance left set aside and thus useless.

So here then that day (now just past three years ago) my and my companions' first look ever upon that long-whispered-of mystery quarter – into that nailed shut room, that as if heavily iron-shuttered armoured room – a man's live-in tomb. I suspect that's where the district constabulary found the wasted body some years past a quarter-century ago now, one snowy winter's March morning, after the former maid (Susie D. now must be full century old if living still) [Susie Derksen recently died] reported John wasn't answering his door-bell or responding to repeated banging over a series of attempts and a suspiciously long period of time even by his trying standards. And with, no more, neither the sound of his furious full-length-of-the-great-hallway thunder-echoing or dark muttering marches and successive slamming of 30-odd great hallway, bedroom and parlour doors, nor any more any glimpse of his grey cropped, gaunt sallow head peeping suspiciously from out behind a tattered roll-up blind. Plain as day, there it all was now for us here – my sister, her husband and I. Decades along. Lumpy antique mattresses folded and buckled and belted in piles among vintage chipped and scummy bathtub and rusted out water closet standing askew among past era newsprint, random yellowed paperbacks, textbooks (all his favoured subjects: the tactics and weapons of war, antique automobiles and machinery, and the history of modern medicine), and in the hallway there alone and incongruous a large doll's or infant's disquieting empty lace-frilled bassinette, with whatever else time and damp had slowly gnawed at and molested.

Much as with our many other striking basement, main floor, and attic sightings that summer day, appeared there as if both materializing and disintegrating under our gaze – before our eyes – the pair of WW1-era khaki canvas flared-hip riding pants with lace-up ankles and flap-and-button crotch. Oddly half propped half hanging like a soldier's ghost over the mantle of a long-cold fireplace (that being the middle fireplace of five spaced evenly throughout the great length of the place). And a stiff green full-length crinoline corset-bustier among the rubble in the filth, there in the extreme north-end guest bedroom once furnished in spotless dazzling all-white wicker, a guestroom which I doubt any local guest, then or ever, slept in. The Ords were not known as hosts. Not to us, and not anyone – so far as I knew. Though perhaps unbeknownst to me in its heyday higher-ups from the hop-farm industry, the family's major

local enterprise, tangled their well-heeled Yankee legs under that colossal ornate dining-room table in the evening hours, cigar smoke drifting out those grand summer windows open to the sound of forest songbirds and the mountain stream and waterfall.

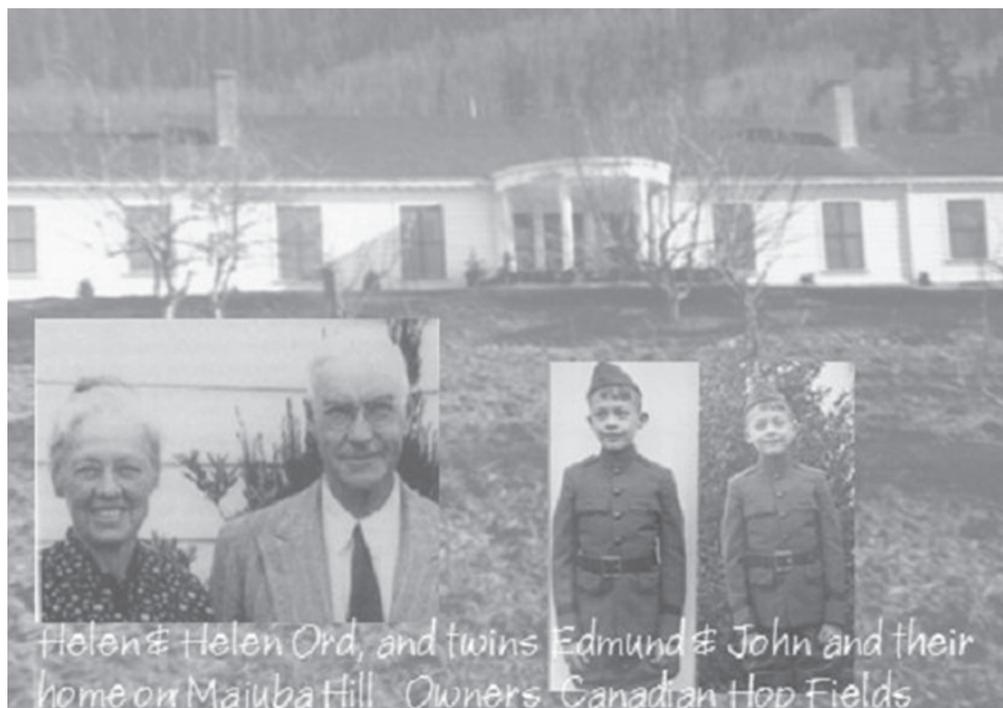
Remembered now, and turned over again in the mind and imagination, as all this somehow conspires to conjure a surreal vision; stale stinking John (I mentioned, the man never bathed), self-nursed with veterinarian horse-dose-strength penicillin, day-to-day sustained only with a local grocer's tinned goods and US aerospace "astronaut program"-type dehydrated foodstuffs (long-term mainstays of his doctoring and diet), and he in his thick ear-flapped plaid hunter's cap, greatcoat and army boots; he's hooked arm in arm with a young emerald-eyed and half-gone-with-the-wind Miss Scarlett O'Hara, who famed director Fleming in fact filmed for that classic's perhaps most memorable scene there in one of the Ord family's stately dwellings in and around old Los Angeles's San Marino, descending that great white spiral stair and balustrade.

But here at the Canadian summerhouse, those fragile seemingly in many ways almost ghostly folk – that storied family – they were not ever even truly roundly welcoming or hospitable – not generous that way, to us the employed peasantry. For all that they had, and all that is locally left of it, even in their secret attic walk-in cedar-closet (that which local carpenter, the late Samuel Klaassen built) once flush with plush assorted furs and ballroom gowns and life-size dancer marionettes, in the flash-lit darkness we saw there now but a dusty scattering of a few flattened filthy last-century hats that even a field scarecrow wouldn't wear well. And there too the mounted head of some goatish beady-eyed beast staring back at me. (My sister behind me, laughing in the dark then, me startled, said my body stiffened and my silhouette jumped.)

Alas, in spite of our granted welcome, one little corner we were unable to trespass even that day with the house wide open, was the south end office, that being the family business office

with but the one entrance – from directly outside, straight off that grassy end's rutted driveway where John's old truck with the cockeyed headlight was regularly parked, time out of mind. The just new landowner (interestingly someone who as a boy had adventured around and about the woodland property) already partway into process of early-steps demolition and major landscaping had nailed a solid plank across that section's great-hinged door that wouldn't have easily budged. We of course took the clear message – respecting it, since we were otherwise welcomed and just happy and grateful to be there. So peered through a broken latticed-window section, stealing squinted sideways glimpses, to see it still housed at least possibly partway legible faded paperwork among century-old filing cabinets, and drawers and boxes of what appeared to be pay stubs and log books and ledgers (no doubt pertaining to the family's local commercial hop-growing enterprise, down in our province's now smartly diked and canalled former lake reclamation project, fanning out across and checkering the now dry fertile Sumas bottomlands grid at the foot of the hill).

Those multiple hundreds of long-forgotten messages and transactions might have been fascinating to rifle through, as this was the one last place in among those mansion walls I'd never in all my days had access to. (In fact the interim owners who'd begun but had to abandon the grand renovation project a decade or so ago kindly



Helen and Henry Ord, and their twin sons Edmund and John, with the home on Majuba Hill in the background. Photo source: http://www.yarrowbc.ca/settlers/settlers1946_55.html

sent me a couple hop-yard-related cancelled cheques and pay stubs – since my father had been both the field harvest-time and off-season foreman, and at different times operated as such in both the Ord family’s Fraser Valley and Kamloops yards.) Suspicious old John, the self-outcast son, had kept the office barricaded then too. But, truth be told, had the office been accessible now I might still be there today pouring over meaningless yet once-important numbers, dollar signs, and signatures. So I suppose it just as well and for the best, since to whatever extent we for better for worse carry it forward, the past is the past.

And indeed, all this there to be observed, examined, is an interesting commentary on life. Those former ventures, those vital concerns, of seeming little or no concern now. Though certainly in some way something of everything, however temporal, remains and steadfast sustains us. Here, there, and everywhere invisible, abiding, hang our grand labours’ and endeavours’ variable fruits (of solid gritty economic enterprise and, I suppose, of things ethereal – things spiritual and metaphysical), that multifaceted essence of all aspects of our generations of industry affording us our livelihoods, even as are the great mysteries and vagaries of any one man’s soul (old John absolutely and foremost included) perhaps strangely invested in and to a degree affording us our mortality – for richer or poorer. For our time indeed, however spent, seems both rare and precious either way – each moment not static, compounding ad infinitum. Yet, as the writer (Walter de la Mare) once said, “Time has other means of sepulcher than the grave.”

Whatever the case, it was a rare and precious day for my companions and me, an experience to roundly consider before bittersweetly filing it away somewhere dead centre between heart, mind, and soul. And the lovely thing I first saw as we had walked up past the front gate and then down around the westward-facing white-pillared rotund porch where, near by, the creek and waterfall plunges down the green-slope mountainside to the old winding railroad far bellow, was a splendidly handsome red-tail hawk gliding away on the silver late morning air and settling onto a nearby bare limb in the thick shady woods just below us. I could have happily eased myself down in the downslope meadow that moment and let nothing but open and free thoughts and memories drift away, wondering how it might well be that the winged thing was, by however many raptor-generations removed, directly descended from the very red-tail that had sometimes soared silently over, casting its wonder-

fully undulating shadow, when I was the wee hunched-over boy in my working rounds there a good half-century ago. The gliding bird-of-prey benign and mindless of and far removed from my or any human striving and concerns, our wealth, our poverty, our conscious and unconscious wastefulness and suffering, and, praise be, occasional soulful largesse.

I climbed down the wooded path a ways to get a good look back at the ever single-voiced old waterfall. Other than a sprinkling of silent blue-violet periwinkles only the cool and the quiet call of creek and falls greeted me, still offering its ageless soothing sound up there on that property, such a peaceful murmur coming from the sun-dappled woods. I’d always treasured that one aspect of being there. After the hard work was done, the roaring mower choked off and sounds of all other manual labour and tools stopped, this wonderful quiet. A misty cooling shawl of mountain-air would seem to descend like some great-spanned slow-circling angel of mothering mercy, that being only the enwrapping air of the rustling woods. So perfectly wonderful it was to just drop there in the mossy shade, enjoy the eternal moment, its enchantment. (Until needle-nosed blood-sucking Majuba Hill insects would find you out and mercilessly high-pitch hum about the ears!)

My dear comrades and I enjoyed such wonderful moments there, however we, myself and my companions too, were toward the last perhaps running just a little low on energy, still our happiness was unflagging; us all carrying our lesser and greater infirmities of one sort and another (mercifully not – not yet at least – to the hopelessly complicated often unfathomable extent of sorry old long-gone John). And so we only stopped for raspberry-rhubarb pie at the small local airport cafe and motored back to the big city without stopping in on one single soul (dead or living) down in the old hometown. Perhaps another time, long after the dust of the demolitions and new construction has supplanted that once storied (and indeed now vanished) mansion on the hill.

My sister, brother-in-law and I were happy and remain grateful for the chance to be there again after all those years, and mindful of what would almost certainly be a “last goodbye.” An unexpected farewell to the remembered century-old place that certainly played a most significant role in our family life – and in the earlier days of the Californian family’s hop farming concerns, the life of a community. Our lives (my family’s) back when we all lived in the village below, and laboured up on the hill, where and when seemingly everyone knew everyone

(though some remained greater or lesser mysteries), yes, some even to the degree of poor, puzzling, fusty old John. And so too everyone there, be they merely for hire, or heir to an early 19th century railroad and real estate magnate and masterpiece art collector's fortune or not.

There when and where everyone was on common party line and dialed zero for "operator" and/or local Underhill-8 for "Ords," be it on old rotary, or that well remembered great vintage crank-handled wall-mount with spout mouthpiece and long-electrical-chord earpiece receiver, the apparatus hung shining black and metallic upon the mansion's maid-closet's wall. Long gone. Long-

distance. All's going and gone, gone along to where there's no signage, no secrets, no locks, no distances. And where, anymore, even more so than it was for us that mid-summer day, there can be no such silly thing as "trespassing" – not from any point of view. Concerning our and any man's properties, perhaps all shall be happily trespassed, all with great open-arms welcome. Though dead asleep in that ground, come to pass in the blessed society of the sweet hereafter. All what I've wondered at, and for all those we've loved in our way.

An Old Fashioned Romance

By Julia Born Toews

"Grandma, how did Grandpa ask you to marry him?"

Grandma and I were in the kitchen cleaning up after supper. The aroma of chicken soup and homemade bread still lingered in the air and completed my sense of well-being. As I waited for her answer, I glanced around the cozy room: at the pictures on the wall, the flowers in bloom on the windowsill, the green electric clock above the fridge, the brown Marconi radio on the low china cabinet. It was one of the weekends I lived with them when I came *home* from attending the University of BC. My parents lived elsewhere, and for practical purposes 2728 Clearbrook Road, in Clearbrook (now Abbotsford), the home of my maternal grandparents, John K. & Anna Brandt, was my home address. Often Grandpa helped out after mealtimes, but on this particular night he needed to attend to his secretarial duties at a meeting in the church across the street, and Grandma and I were alone.

Sometimes in these quiet evenings Grandma was more inclined to chat about her life, and sometimes I remembered to inquire. At this question, though, she looked at me half annoyed and half amused. "*Na, du wellst emma wot weite,*" was her Low German comment, said with a slight breath of exasperation. Usually she talked to me in English, but with this intrusion into her personal life, she responded in her childhood language. *You do ask the questions, don't you?*

I looked at her and considered what to do. Should I take the hint and drop the subject? How badly did I want to know? I looked around the room. Even the

flowers in the window looked as if they were blushing slightly at such a probing question in this chaste household. Then I remembered a small incident that happened last night.

While Grandma was taking a bath, Grandpa was watching the news on their fuzzy TV. I was in the kitchen getting a drink of water, when I was startled by Grandpa suddenly rushing through the room, muttering, "I'm forgetting. Grandma needs her back scrubbed." He rushed into the bathroom to help Grandma out.

Such ardour I seldom encountered even on the free-wheeling university campus.

With this in mind, I decided to make another try. "Grandma, I really would like to know."

"*Na,*" she began, and the story unfolded. "One night he came in late from choir practice. He lived with us, you know. He was the new teacher in town (Greenfarm, Saskatchewan), and when he came, no one in town wanted to open their home and take in another person. Everybody had such large families. But my dad, even though he had a full house himself, said he had room for one more. So, your Grandpa came to live with us. That night he was hungry and wanted something to eat. I was in the kitchen at the time, and gave him some food. As he ate, he said to me, 'Let's get married.' (*Sol we uns be-frie?*) And that was it."

"Grandma," I probed, "what were you doing in the kitchen at that time?"

"Oh, I was just puttering about the stove, doing this and that." I got the picture. Here was this lovely young girl, who, just after losing her step-mother, was now, I

suspect, “mothering” the rest of the family and also tending to the needs of this handsome young teacher (as she would do for the rest of his life). I wondered what subtle glances, talks, and perhaps walks preceded this intimate conversation.

“So, Grandma, what did you say?”

“Well, I told him he needed to talk to my dad about that. My dad was very strict about such matters. And so that’s what he did.”

And that’s all she said about the proposal. It seemed to me that even the flowers on the windowsill were relieved that this self-disclosure was over and they stood a bit straighter.

As time went by, I learned of the story behind the story of this

“romance.” It seems there were several factors present to “arrange” for the marriage of these two young people.

John and Anna’s families both came to Canada from Russia on the same boat, the *Augusta Victoria*, in 1903. Cornelius and Margaret Brandt and their family travelled first-class, for accompanying them was old Grandma Justina Brandt who had a bad leg and needed extra care. Johann and Anna Thiessen and their family travelled third-class, needing to save their resources. These families had a close connection, for my grandma’s mother, Anna, had, at one time, lived with the Brandts and served as a maid in their household. Both families eventually settled in Saskatchewan.

John’s lifelong ambition was to be a teacher. He had sold his farm in Saskatchewan and used the proceeds to acquire an education. His first placement as a teacher was in the Lowe Farm (Saskatchewan) School District. Then the Greenfarm School Board (also Saskatchewan) invited him to teach there. This is where his parents had hoped he would be placed. Was it because the Johann Thiessen family lived there? In his autobiography he wrote, “Although I really did not have a reason to make the change [from Lowe Farm to Greenfarm], except to satisfy my parents ... I accepted the new position.” At that time a teacher was given room and board with a family in the area. As Grandma related to me, not many families had



Anna Thiessen and John K. Brandt on their wedding day. Photo: courtesy of Julia M. Toews

room for an extra person. But Johann Thiessen “stretched the tent” and invited the new teacher to stay with him. Johann had a large family, including a newborn baby. Shortly afterwards, Johann decided to get married again – to a Mrs. Toews, who also had a large family.

Then there is the admission John made in his autobiography. “The people at Greenfarm were very helpful and offered to build a teacherage *as soon as I would get married* [italics mine]. Well, in a year’s time the coaxing and prayers of my parents paid off and in 1919 Anna Thiessen and I were married.”

John must have spoken with Anna’s father very soon after this curt proposal, for Johann suggested they get married on August 18, 1919, the day he himself was planning to get married to Mrs. Toews. (Johann Thiessen outlived four wives.)

A double wedding!

And that is what they did.

Grandpa went to town and bought a wedding dress and shoes for Anna, got himself a lovely boutonniere, complete with a long ribbon, and they were married.

They were married for 53 years, had twelve children, and lived a life of service to their community and their church. After a few years in Saskatchewan, they moved to Manitoba to help look after extended family, and eventually came to British Columbia.

At their fiftieth wedding anniversary, Grandma wore her lovely wedding dress – though with all the pleats undone to make it fit.

All in all, not a very romantic story by present-day notions. However, I sensed their strong attachment to each other on another occasion. I was admiring a photograph of Grandma holding a potted plant with a big bloom. Grandpa’s comment (in Low German) when he saw this picture was, “*Daut’s meene blaum!*” (“There’s my flower!”) He was obviously referring to Grandma, and he said it with a hidden, teasing, smile (a *Schmunzel*), the kind of smile I suspect he had, when, long ago, between spoonfuls of a late-night snack, he asked Grandma to marry him.

Genealogy Column: The Ties that Bind The Three Mullers: 1840-1974 (Müller)

By David F. Loewen

The first generation

Friedrich Müller (1840-1911) was born to a wealthy Roman Catholic family in eastern Germany. He was well-educated and, by the age of 20, had achieved his goal as journeyman in farm implement manufacturing. While growing up, he associated with evangelical young people and with relatives who brought a refreshing spiritual freedom to his rigid upbringing. Consequently, he became a born-again believer, resulting in his being disowned by his parents.

Friedrich had made the acquaintance of Katarina Gläsemann, leading to their marriage and subsequent move to Odessa, Ukraine. Here he continued his trade as a blacksmith; this included the manufacture of wagons and farm implements. In addition, he became a Bible distributor, and this activity became his passion. His work among Orthodox Russians led to their persecution at the hands of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Around 1880, the Müllers, along with their three sons, moved to Wohldemfürst in the Kuban (in the northern Caucasus, between the Black and Caspian Seas), where Friedrich established a thriving horse-drawn carriage and wagon manufacturing business, employing about 200. Here they became active in the Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church, and their three sons grew to adulthood and married.

The second

Heinrich Müller (1876-1922), the youngest of Friedrich's three sons, married Maria Liesch in 1898. Heinrich and Maria had nine children, of which Heinrich (Jr.) was the fourth oldest, born in 1905. Of his childhood, Heinrich Jr. writes, "Perhaps the most endearing memories for me in those early Kuban years was the music in our home. It all began before I was born when my parents, as newlyweds, joined a choral society. The goal of each member was to master and memorize 1000 songs. This was their honeymoon – singing and learning these German and Russian songs. It was a mix of hymns, chorales, cantatas, folksongs, love songs, children's and nature songs. This cross-section of music set the tone for their family and

later also for my own family. Both Papa and Mama had fine voices: Mama, a clear, high soprano; Papa, a deep, rolling bass. Papa played the violin, clarinet and bass horn; Mama played the guitar."

An important event occurred on May 6 every year. The community would make a day-trip to the Kuban River with horse and buggy. It was a joyful celebration, a day filled with games, singing and plenty of good food. The brass band, led by Heinrich Müller, lent a festive air to the occasion, and helped to bond the Kuban community together.

Heinrich lost interest in building carriages in the Kuban, and in 1912 he took advantage of an offer of free land near Slavgorod, and moved his young family there, a gruelling journey of 4500 kilometres from the Kuban. He laid claim to some sizeable acreage and built a flour-mill and log house near Slavgorod. The small mill he built kept him very busy, but not enough to make an adequate living. Entrepreneur that he was, he took in a partner, Mr. Hamm, and then made a deal with the government to enlarge the mill and install some new equipment. The war with Germany had not yet begun, ena-



Friedrich and Katarina Mueller with their three sons. All photos that accompany this article: courtesy of David F. Loewen

bling him to purchase a huge Otto Deutz steam engine and related machinery in order to properly equip this new expanded mill. As a result of the upgrade, instead of only 100 pud per day, he was producing 2400 pud per day (1 pud equals just over 16 kilograms).

This now became a huge operation. Horse-drawn wagons, loaded with wheat, pulled in every day, and wagonloads of flour moved out every day. For five days of the week, he would mill government product, thus paying off the loan. During the rest of the week, he would buy wheat and other grains from surrounding Russian farmers, and then resell to them the flour and other milled products such as cattle feed. Flour was also sold to the co-operatives and other outlets. Notwithstanding the added stress, the business plan came together well, and after three years, in 1916, all the government debt was paid off.

Heinrich also bought a 120-acre hobby farm a short distance out of town. He acquired an additional one-acre lot at the edge of town, with a house, a small barn, and a well. This site he used at first to house the farm helpers during the winter. Somehow, he also managed to purchase a house in his hometown in the Kuban, a shrewd move that would prove useful for his family in a few short years.

Through unfortunate circumstances, he lost the mill, following which he received an appointment as general manager of the Cooperative Society; his duties included oversight of the Co-op's 42 stores in the region. These stores handled general merchandise – like a combined department store, grocery store, building supply and farm supply all in one – similar to the Co-op stores familiar to most Canadians.

At about the same time, Heinrich became deputy mayor. The job did not pay much but it did require that he attend the various meetings at city hall. The civic leaders of all departments very quickly sought his advice, and he soon gained the respect and friendship of many in authority, including the police and the military. It also became apparent that he was gifted in mediation. His presence at times of tension, in which he defused volatile situations, appeared to his son Heinrich as some kind of magic.

Besides his involvement in business and politics, Heinrich Müller's Christian faith and church life were of utmost im-

portance to him. Owing to his upbringing, he was also very musical, playing as an accomplished violinist in the local orchestra.

During the tumultuous years following the Revolution, the family suffered through the period of food shortages, even though Heinrich was earning 20,000 rubles per month at the Cooperative. He lost that position in 1920, and shortly thereafter he was imprisoned for unknown reasons, only to be released two days later, thanks to the intervention of a local military commander. In 1919, following the assassination of the mayor by young Bolsheviks, Heinrich had become acting mayor. And within two years (1922, shortly before Christmas), Heinrich suffered the same fate, when a young Bolshevik followed him out of city hall and shot him in the back.

And the third

In 1924, son Heinrich (1905-1974), along with his widowed mother and siblings, returned to the Kuban, a 22-day journey by train. Fortuitously for the family, Heinrich Sr. had purchased a house in Wohldemfürst. Heinrich, along with his two younger brothers began taking on masonry jobs in support of the family, thus learning a trade that would be his mainstay for life.

Heinrich had been baptized in the *Kirchliche* Mennonite Church in Slavgorod in 1922. However, upon his return to the Kuban, he decided to attend the Mennonite Brethren Church, where he met his future wife, Olga Schmidt. In keeping with MB practice, he was baptized by immersion in the Kuban River on July 1, 1927, and joined the MB Church. Heinrich Müller and Olga



Henry Mueller and comrades in an army band, circa 1927.

Schmidt were married on 18 October 1928, in Kuban Colony, South Russia.

In November 1930, Heinrich and his young family managed to leave the Soviet Union. Apart from his younger sister Erna, whom Heinrich would sponsor for immigration in 1972, all other family members remained in the Soviet Union, his brothers perishing soon thereafter, and his mother dying of hunger in a rail car while under the care of his older sister.

From Russia with love

Heinrich and family arrived in Morden, Manitoba, in February 1931, having spent some time in a refugee camp named Sperlingslust, near the town of Prenzlau, northern Germany. Heinrich moved from Morden to Sardis, BC, within the year, living first on Adams Road, and then on 10 acres on South Sumas Road, where he was able to build a new house. In 1945, Heinrich and Olga decided to move to Abbotsford to have their children closer to the newly-established Mennonite high school. They bought twenty acres on Short Road, which was only a mile from the high school which daughter Rita was already attending.

From the time of his arrival in Morden in 1931, Heinrich managed to find work that enabled him to support a family, and soon after, to purchase his first home in Sardis. From 1931 to 1956, leaning on the trade he had mastered in Russia, Heinrich was primarily in the brick and stucco business, employing two crews. He built about 500 fireplaces in Chilliwack, did stucco and plaster jobs on about 700 houses, and did complete house constructions. He also did the stucco and plaster work on several churches, including East Chilliwack Mennonite, First Avenue Schwaben Church, Greendale MB and First Mennonite, Yarrow MB, South Abbotsford MB, and Clearbrook MB, among others.

In addition to his obligations to family, farm, and business, as well as to church, he was elected to the building committee of the newly proposed high school – the Mennonite Educational Institute, or *Mennonitisches Erziehungs Institut*, in Clearbrook. Heinrich was very soon persuaded to oversee construction of the new school; he spent most of that year working for \$2 per hour. Construction took place under a severely restricted budget, a poor selection of qualified tradesmen,

Heinrich declared that, for some years, the Lord had shown him how people could be healed through physical manipulation.



Henry and Olga Mueller.

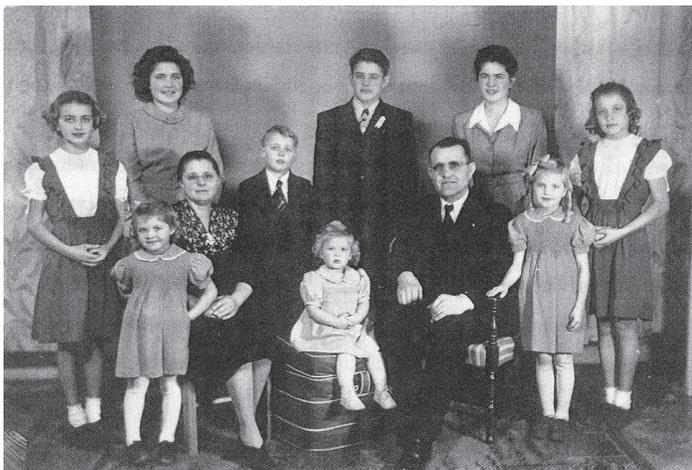
and a highly accelerated completion date, as well as a shortage of building materials, due to the war. The goal was to have occupancy by Christmas of that year; it was achieved. Heinrich remarked 25 years later, “Just what were we thinking?”

Construction, music, and a fourth generation

In 1956, Heinrich and his two sons, Henry and Bruno, established H. H. Muller & Sons. While Heinrich supervised the millwork shop on Short Road, and Bruno supervised distribution of building materials, Henry was successfully bidding on construction jobs, which soon focused on school construction in the Cariboo region of BC. Eventually, Henry would be recognized as British Columbia’s most prolific school builder, having built just over 200.

Heinrich had grown up in a home with a strong musical heritage, one which he would pass on to all his children. Consequently, his adult life of service in the church revolved around music. In total, he gave 27 years of service to church music ministry, both singing and leading children in song in numerous churches: Morden, Greendale, South Abbotsford, Prince Rupert, and County Line churches. Many times, his entire family was called on to sing in church services.

In 1962, Heinrich and Olga moved to Prince Rupert, where he assumed the position of federal works inspector for a period of three years. In 1965, the couple returned to Minter Street in Clearbrook, where the new home he had built had a room dedicated to Heinrich’s newest pursuit – masseur. Heinrich declared that, for some years, the Lord had shown him how people could be healed through physical manipulation. He felt that he had the gift of touch in his hands and that, by applying



Henry and Olga Mueller with family, circa 1948.

I Went for a Walk

By Lois Klassen

On September 19, 2018, almost nine months to the day since my husband died, I attended the evening pilgrim mass at the Basilica of San Isidoro in León, Spain. After the celebration of the Eucharist, pilgrims from all over the world were called forward to stand in a semi-circle in front of the priest in this old and magnificent church. There were about thirty of us. The rest of the congregation stayed in their seats.

I had been told that we would be asked what language we spoke so that we could be given a copy of the Pilgrim's Prayer in our mother tongue. When I heard the priest ask a question with the word *inglés* in it I raised one finger to shoulder height while looking around to see if anyone else was raising their hand. The priest started vigorously beckoning me forward and beaming down on me so I took a few steps forward. No, he beckoned me to come closer so I walked to the foot



Starting out early morning. All photos that accompany this article: courtesy of Lois Klassen.

the right pressure in the right places, relief, or even permanent healing was possible, a fact that many clients would attest to. They were attracted to him by word-of-mouth. During these years, Heinrich and Olga were active in ministry at County Line Church.

In 1972, Heinrich and Olga joined the Clearbrook MB Church. The following year, the Mennonite Board of Missions and Service (MBMS) asked Heinrich to oversee the construction of a church in Africa in the spring of 1974, thus giving him time to raise the necessary funds. He expected to have the funds by year's end. However, the unexpected death of Olga that fall, and his own four months later, on March 10, 1974, intervened.

Heinrich and Olga Muller had two sons and seven daughters: Rita, Erna, Bruno, Olga, Henry, Kathy, Eva, Doris, and Magdalene. Heinrich Muller is remembered as a man of compassion and integrity; a man with vision and character; and a man with a child-like trust in his heavenly Father.

Author's note: Some years ago, I was given a digital copy of Heinrich Muller's autobiography by son Bruno Muller. It had lain dormant in my computer until several months ago, when I read it for the first time. I realized that herein lies the story of a remarkable businessman, churchman, musician, and father. I felt compelled to ensure this story is preserved and shared, and to that end, I've submitted a biography for GAMEO; I am publishing the entire autobiography for our Mennonite archives; and I've submitted this article for publication in *Roots and Branches*. The original autobiography has been translated from German to English by son Bruno Muller (1933-2015).

of the steps. No, no, he wanted me to come up the steps and stand beside him! Are we all going to be called up by language groups? I wondered, but when I got to his side he, still beaming at me encouragingly, handed me a laminated sheet with the order of the blessing service written in Spanish and underneath each paragraph the English translation in red. That is when it dawned on me that I had volunteered to read the translation!

He began with one hand firmly over my hand on the paper (probably to ensure I wouldn't bolt). I read as clearly and steadily as I could into the microphone, conscious that it was an honour to be asked to participate in such a lovely sending ceremony of blessing. Each time it was my turn to read, he squeezed my hand encouragingly.

Halfway down the page my eyes suddenly filled with tears and my voice wobbled – the beauty of the words, the centuries of tradition that undergirded them, the knowledge that I was truly setting out to answer a strong inner call – I am not sure exactly what flooded through me at that moment – but I did not want to blubber and make a spectacle so I took a breath and continued. Just when I thought I had successfully discharged my duties the priest tightened his grip on my hand and ... there was a second page.

Near the end of the ceremony, which included a reading of the beautiful “Blessing and Prayer of the Pilgrim,” the priest and congregation sang a song for us – a Spanish song written by one of their own congregants – and we joined in the chorus. In the end we were encouraged to give the statue of St. James a hug once we reached the cathedral in Santiago.

That was the slightly comical and very moving start to a pilgrimage of thanks which would take me from the city of León to the Cathedral of Saint James in Santiago de Compostela, a journey on foot of approximately 320 kilometres.

Along with a heart full of grief, I was taking with me one extra set of clothing, a rain jacket and a sun hat, a

My intention was to remember Heinz and, in remembering, thank God for him and for the 47 years of our marriage.

whole lot of creams and potions, and anti-inflammatory drugs which I was hoping would soothe the inflamed Achilles tendon of my left foot enough to allow me to finish. What drives a Mennonite woman well past the midpoint of her sixtieth dec-



Symbol of a pilgrim - a clam shell attached to my backpack.

ade to undertake such a trek? Pilgrimage was not a part of my Mennonite religious tradition, unless the enforced displacement of the refugee counted as a pilgrimage. I was not a hill-walker – more of a hill-avoider if the truth be told – yet here I was, in Spain, about to set off voluntarily through the León mountains with an injured foot.

To walk the Camino de Santiago had been my husband Heinz's dream, not mine. He had read about it while in the intensive care ward of the Chilliwack Hospital in the mid-1990s. At that time about 2,000 pilgrims a year completed the walk on the “Frances route” (Camino de Francés) from St.-Jean-Pied-de-Port in France to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, a journey of approximately 800 kilometres. It captured his imagination and called to his spirit. He announced, “If I survive this, I am going to walk the Camino.” He did survive, for more than twenty years after this declaration, but sadly was never again well enough to fulfill his vow. I was doing this for him. Together with some of the more than 300,000 pilgrims who now yearly walk one of the routes of the Way of St. James, I was going to attempt to complete the last 300 kilometres of the Frances route.

From the start, I never thought of my pilgrimage as an



adventure and I knew it certainly was not going to be a holiday. It seemed to me that, like fasting and other religious disciplines, the act of making a pilgrimage was a sacrifice with intention. My intention was to remember Heinz and, in remembering, thank God for him and for the 47 years of our marriage.

And so it was fitting that, sixteen days after I participated in the service of blessing in León and set out for “a walk,” and finally limped into the city of Santiago to have my picture taken in front of the cathedral and attend the noon pilgrims’ mass, it was at the start of Thanksgiving weekend in Canada.

A day after arriving, I presented myself at the pilgrim office to show my Canadian Company of Pilgrim’s “passport,” or *Credencial*, with stamps from hostels, churches and coffee bars along the way, indicating my slow progress across northwestern Spain. This was my proof that I had walked. On the back of the document I had copied out a verse from the Psalms which a friend had sent to me:

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. When they walk through the valley of weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs. Psalm 84:5-6

I placed the battered and rain-damaged document on the counter in front of the official; and on top of it a photo of my husband standing in front of one of his own artworks; and on top of that the program card from his funeral with his picture on the cover. I said a silent prayer and asked, “Could I have both our names entered on the *compostela* (certificate of completion), *por favor?*”

“He is your husband? You are walking in his memory?”

I nodded.

“But of course.”

Both our names were entered on the ornate Latin

document, along with the signature of the Chapter Secretary and the official seal of the Holy Apostolic Metropolitan Cathedral of St. James. I carried that precious piece of paper out of the office and into the city of Santiago with a lighter heart.

The next day, I went and did as the priest in León had suggested. I lined up to “embrace the Apostle.” Like hundreds of thousands of pilgrims before me, I climbed the narrow stone steps behind the chancery of the magnificent Cathedral of St. James, until I stood directly behind the gilded statue of St. James. I looked over his shoulder down the long nave of the cathedral toward the *Pórtico de la Gloria*, an entryway of carved stone that is considered one of the masterpieces of medieval art (now under tarps for restoration). I placed my arms around the shoulders of the Saint and, in that attitude of embrace, prayed a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the life of my husband, for our marriage, and for my safety on the way. And then I relinquished my place to the next pilgrim in line, descended the worn stone steps on the other side and turned my thoughts and my heart back to home.

The Blessing and Prayer of the Pilgrim

Dear Lord our God,

you took your servant Abraham out of his homeland protecting him in all his pilgrimages, being the Hebrew people’s guide throughout the desert. We humbly beseech your blessing for these children who, for the love [of] your name, go on pilgrimage to Compostela. Be for them companion on their way, guidance at the crossroads, shelter on the road, shade in the heat, light in the darkness, comfort in their discouragement, and strength in their intentions; may they arrive safe and well to the end of their pilgrimage with your guidance and protection, and enriched with your gifts, may they go home full of your love, of your peace and joy.

We ask this for Jesus Christ our Lord.

MHSBC event

Lecture by Dr. Brian Froese, “From Planting Crops to Church Planting: Mennonite Faith, Identity, and Economic Prosperity in Post-War British Columbia.” March 7, 2019, Level Ground Church.

Reported by Robert Martens

Brian Froese, associate professor of history at Canadian Mennonite University, began his talk with a reference to a motion in Canadian Parliament by Ed Fast: that the second week of September be henceforth designated as Mennonite heritage week. Fast, Member of Parliament for the opposition Conservative Party, referred to Mennonites as refugees who made good through such values as tolerance, hard work, and generosity.* Mennonites, in this perspective, have fully integrated into a Canadian society that shares these same values.

Of course, Mennonites have not always been so welcome, remarked Dr. Froese. World War II, for example, engendered suspicion, even racism, towards these German-speaking immigrants. Over the next decades, Mennonites struggled to gain acceptance in the Canadian mainstream while, to a greater or lesser extent, maintaining traditional values. Brian Froese’s lecture focused

on these issues from two historical perspectives.

1. The first half of the talk consisted of a reflection on a paper, “From Chickens to Condos,” that Froese had written as a young post-graduate student. As the title might suggest, that paper researched the growing prosperity of Mennonites in BC and the rise to prominence of Mennonite entrepreneurs. During the 1920s and 1930s, Mennonites migrated westward from the Canadian prairies. Yarrow, Froese said, became a temporary ethnic centre, where Mennonites worked in raspberry fields, hop yards, or logging camps. Poverty was soon mostly a thing of the past; churches and schools were built to preserve a religious and cultural identity that was perceived to be under threat. Cheap land eventually drew Mennonites westward once again, into the Abbotsford area. Clearbrook developed into a heavily Mennonite settlement.

Traditionally, said Froese, Mennonites were isolationist and spurned conspicuous consumption. Yet, after World War II, they achieved prosperity, embraced consumerism, and clearly stated their loyalty to the adopted homeland. Questions arose that still persist, said Froese: For example, where are the lines drawn around the Mennonite community? What is the relationship to “the world?” What accommodations were made in assimilating?

Attitudes changed fundamentally; one response, said



Brian Froese during his lecture at Level Ground Church. Photo: Jennifer Martens

Froese, was “Mennonites are not very good at taking orders so we may as well just run things.” Entrepreneurs, though, were regarded by fellow-Mennonites with some suspicion: being both a Mennonite and businessman might be perceived as contradictory. “Why not just leave?” some asked. Entrepreneurs felt the sting, feeling alienated within the church but still being asked to ante up the cash. Mostly, however, they felt “it was important to stay.” With its non-hierarchical relationships, church was a place they could rediscover a sense of balance; their employees might be seated beside them.

2. The tricky business of maintaining some kind of communal Mennonite identity while living individualistically was not, of course, restricted to entrepreneurs. In the second part of his presentation, Froese explored how the same issues dogged those involved in Mennonite domestic missions.

Church planting and missions techniques perfected in Saskatchewan were being utilized as missions workers moved westward to BC (BC was “Saskatchewanized,” Froese quipped). The early focus was on work with children, eventually resulting in the establishment of the West Coast Children’s Mission. Missions work then expanded to include adults and the Indigenous. It was not easy work: some Mennonites took jobs as teachers in northern BC and did missions on weekends. Additionally, the province of BC, before rapid expansion took place under the Social Credit regime, was a rugged and irreligious place – among the provinces, BC had the lowest church attendance in Canada.

Missions workers in BC thought of themselves as working on the frontier: it was dangerous, lonely labour done without benefit of modern conveniences. On one occasion, their work was even eloquently compared with the 1858 Gold Rush. Missions workers also felt the necessity of dropping non-religious “clannish” Mennonite markers. They viewed their heritage as interesting, said Froese, but confining. Evangelicalism was seen as a liberation from the strictures of the past. The names of new churches frequently did not include the word “Mennonite.”

And what constitutes Mennonite identity today? Ed Fast’s motion in Parliament, said Froese, suggested that Mennonites are thoroughly Canadian. If this is accurate, does a Mennonite identity remain?

*The entire motion can be read at <https://openparliament.ca/debates/2019/2/27/ed-fast-2/>

Book Launches

Reported by Robert Martens

Four launches in August 2018

Mary Derksen, born in 1928 in Ukraine, was on board the very last train of Mennonite refugees to escape the Soviet Union. Her husband, Peter, was Canadian-born. The couple were to spend nearly half a century doing mission work together in Japan. At 2 pm on August 11, Mary presented her memoir entitled *Rise and Shine: 45 years in the land of the Rising Sun*. She is a good storyteller, and held her own against the roar of the Snowbirds performing at the Abbotsford Air Show.

During the Q&A, Derksen said that Japan is a challenge: less than one percent of the population are Christian. Furthermore, Muslim missionaries are not permitted in Japan, she remarked, since the country has not yet learned to accept mixed blood marriages. The biggest personal challenge, though, was language-learning; Peter and Mary, speaking no Japanese at all upon departure from North America had to pick up the language on the job. The Derksens, however, were persistent, raising a family of six children while church-planting in Japan.

Two weeks later, at 2 pm, August 25, a triple book



Mary Derksen with her book. Photo: Julia M. Toews

launch was held at the Museum. Two more memoirs were featured but the afternoon began with a novel that might better be described as creative fiction. Vanessa Voth wrote *the girl from No. 6* based on the experiences of her “Oma,” or grandmother. Voth began by saying that it felt “surreal” to see her name on the cover of a novel. She had always loved hearing her grandmother’s stories, she said, and an idea for a book began to materialize after her father recommended interviewing her Oma “while her mind was still clear.” Voth’s voice broke periodically as she described those interviews that quickly became the highlight of her week.

Writing the “novel” was a way to collect her thoughts, and a tactic to deal with motherhood. Primarily, though, Voth meant to honour her Oma. “If no one read my book,” she said, “it wouldn’t matter to me” since it was “not intended to be a bestseller but to tell my Oma’s story.” Telling that story, she said, has increased her appreciation for her Mennonite heritage “exponentially.”

Selma Kornelson Hooge presented the first of two memoirs of the afternoon: *Life Before Canada*. The book might be called a memoir within a memoir, since much of the content is a translation of the journals written by the author’s mother, Anna Goossen Kornelson. Selma was born at a particularly unlucky time in Marienthal, Molotschna Colony in the Ukraine. She and her family endured the atrocities of the Stalinist state during the 1930s, retreated with the German army from the USSR in 1943, and spent the next five years wandering without

a country or home. “How do you describe this?” she asked rhetorically.

Kornelson Hooge’s family managed to immigrate to Canada and was one of the few to arrive “with a father or brother.” Years later, at the age of 80, said Kornelson Hooge, she began putting this story together. Now, she joked, she has “a book that looks like a book.”

The third book launched that afternoon was *I Remember: A Memoir by Elisabeth Löwen*, translated by Hele-
ne Rempel Klassen, second cousin to “Liesl” Löwen. In the absence of the translator, Neil Klassen of Judson Lake House Publishers presented the book. Work on this book began several years ago; it was “a story that needed to be told,” he said. Elisabeth Löwen, Klassen observed, didn’t “get out” of Russia until the 1980s and “suffered enormously” in the Soviet Union. She had managed to escape the USSR with the retreating German army in 1943 but was “repatriated” by the allies. The Soviets had no intention of allowing these “traitors,” as Klassen put it, to return home. Repatriation meant slave labour in the Gulag.

Klassen read an excerpt from the memoir describing Löwen’s work cutting timber in the Russian wilderness – no training, no doctors. But Liesl survived, “making it out” to Germany in the 1980s. She died in 2017. Löwen’s life, said Klassen, was “a triumph of faith.”

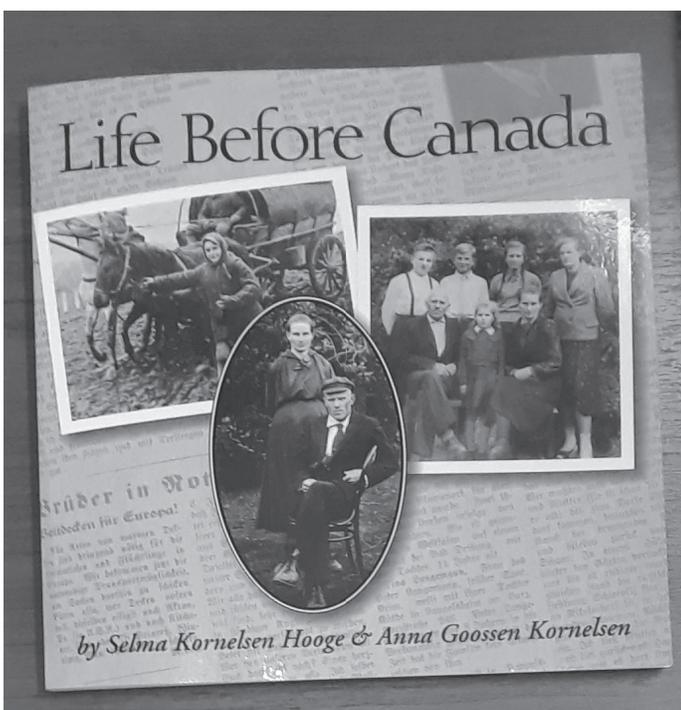
Book launch:

Liz Janzen, *Crash Landing: The Long Road Home*

Liz Janzen’s talk on January 17, 2019, at the Mennonite Heritage Museum was part memoir, part confessional. She grew up in a Mennonite community in the Niagara Peninsula but in her adolescence developed a shame for



Neil Klassen describing the book *I Remember: A Memoir by Elisabeth Löwen*. Photo: Julia M. Toews





Helena Rempel Klassen and Selma Kornelson Hooge getting ready to autograph books at their launch.
Photo: Julia M. Toews

the beliefs of her heritage. Then, she said, “I went to sleep for thirty years.”

Though superficially she was living the so-called “perfect life,” said Janzen, she eventually “woke up.” She divorced, developed a virtual business, and studied the shamanistic traditions of Peru. She also had the epiphany that, in order to understand herself, she needed to understand her ancestors better. From an early age, Janzen had been a passionate motorcyclist. She decided to set off on a cross-country motorcycle journey along the “migration trail,” the places her ancestors had travelled and inhabited when they immigrated to Canada. Three weeks into her journey, a disastrous motorcycle accident in southern Alberta put a stop to her plans. “I was open to what the road delivered,” to being “stripped down,” said Janzen, but “you never get what you wish for.”

Despite some hesitation, though, Janzen did continue her journey, lifted by the strength which her Mennonite ancestors had passed down to her. The result was a memoir, *Crash Landing*. Her expe-



Liz Janzen with her book, *Crash Landing: The Long Road Home*.
Photo: Julia M. Toews

riences had changed her: “Motorcycling is meditation,” she said.

Liz Janzen was in Abbotsford to promote her books at the Vancouver Motorcycle Show at Tradex in Abbotsford.

Book launch: Janet Boldt, *The Diary of Emma Möllmann from 1914 to 1923*. Translated from the original German manuscripts by Peter Neudorf and Barbara Boldt. 8 March 2019, Mennonite Heritage Museum.

With the help of her mother, Janet Boldt had begun transcribing the diaries of her grandmother, Emma Möllmann, who was born into an impoverished Lutheran family and later converted to the Mennonite faith (see *Roots & Branches* Feb 2019). That work ended in 2008 when Janet’s mother died. Recently, she resumed the project, and the book of Emma Möllmann’s translated diaries was launched at the Mennonite Heritage Museum.

It was often difficult work. Some of Emma Möllmann’s writings were bare fragments, scraps of paper with bleeding ink. In addition, a diary, said Boldt, is profoundly different from a memoir, and at times she questioned whether her grandmother would have wanted her most inmost thoughts revealed to a wider public. But Emma Möllman – “strong-willed, opinionated, outspoken” – lived a large life, said Boldt, and “part of me thought she wanted it all to be told.” Boldt remarked that, during her work, she sometimes felt “cocooned in love” by her grandmother and mother and, at visceral moments, identified with her grandmother.

Translation was a kind of sleuthing, she said. Interpretation of language from a very different and violent time could be tricky; the cultural and religious milieu had to be understood and explained for Emma’s words to make sense to the reader. A three-year gap also exists in the diary, a time when Emma faced violence and famine. Perhaps it was all too much for the young woman to record.

“Everything is held together with stories,” said Janet Boldt, and her translation is “about caring for my grandmother’s story.”



Janet Boldt with *The Diary of Emma Möllmann*.
Photo: Jennifer Martens



Bruce Guenther with his book, *The Ältester*.
Photo: Julia M. Toews

Book launch: Bruce L. Guenther, *The Ältester: Herman D.W. Friesen, A Mennonite Leader in Changing Times*. 23 March 2019, Mennonite Heritage Museum.

At the book launch of his biography of his maternal grandfather, Herman Friesen, Dr. Bruce Guenther said the book began as a “hobby.” *Ältester*, or Elder, Friesen died in a tractor accident in 1969. Thirty years later Friesen’s wife passed away, leaving instructions that Herman’s collected sermons (authored both by himself and others) be distributed among his descendants. Before that could happen (and it did not), Guenther “photocopied the whole bunch.” The next twenty years saw Guenther engaged in his “hobby”: translating the sermons and doing research on his *Ältester* grandfather.

The book, Guenther remarked, is a “hybrid.” Too many Mennonite narratives, he said, find themselves “swimming in a Mennonite lake” rather than recognizing “the bigger piece of geography.” Consequently, the book includes biography, Old Colony history, Old Colo-

ny practices and teachings, and the history of Saskatchewan. Writing a hybrid is a risk, and Guenther voiced his hope that he did justice to the complex interweaving of issues.

Another challenge Guenther faced was sensitivity: he was determined not to write the life of a saint. The Friesens’ life was difficult, and mistakes were made. Herman Friesen and his wife, Margaretha (Banman), both born in 1908, were descendants of Old Colony Mennonites who immigrated to Canada in the 1870s. One month after their marriage, their first child was born. Three years later it died of whooping cough; we can only imagine, Guenther said, the guilt and depression that might have caused. Then, when most Old Colony Mennonites left for Mexico in the 1920s after a dispute with the government, the Friesens decided to stay, only to endure the Great Depression.

Herman Friesen entered politics, working as a public school trustee and municipal councillor. This often aroused the antagonism of his neighbours, especially his

duty as a trustee to enforce the teaching of English. Nevertheless, he was elected as church *Ältester*, and served in that capacity while helping raise a large family, establishing a dairy business, and adopting emerging technology.

Bruce Guenther's portrait of his grandfather was movingly empathetic. Herman Friesen was compelled to navigate "an incredibly conservative way of life amid a rapidly changing prairie culture." He made many mistakes: Friesen "was a human being with feet of clay, like you, like me."

Book Review

Vanessa Voth. *The Girl from No. 6: Based on a True Story.*

Victoria, BC: Friesen Press, 2017. 344 pp.

Reviewed by David Giesbrecht

The Girl from No. 6 provides an intimate portrait of a pioneer Paraguayan Mennonite community, the Fernheim Colony. Vanessa Voth has written a story with deep emotional force, largely based on extensive interviews with her grandmother, Maria Penner Loewen. Vanessa's writing style is winsome, easily fusing biography with her creative imagination.

Most of the characters in this story are well-drawn and consistently portrayed. Vanessa has taken care to show how they mature and are variously impacted by the experiences of colony life. Colourful local life is conveyed by the frequent insertion of Low German expressions – translated, of course. Maria, one of the main characters, is a confident, affectionate, determined wife and mother, traits already recognizable in her youth. Among most of the villagers there exists a lively faith; they often proclaim that amidst disappointments and pain, God is good, and deserving of their trust.

This is the story of immigrants who escaped the hor-

rors of life in Soviet Russia in the late 1920s. Especially painful is the memory of their beloved Eichenfeld, where on one fateful day in 1919, 82 Mennonites were brutally killed. Small wonder that once in Paraguay, these immigrants often express a profound gratitude that they were able to escape these killing fields, even as they recall a friendlier past.

The story begins in April 1930. Pioneer life in this very hot and remote part of Paraguay, literally known as Village No. 6, is fragile. Many villagers succumb to death, whether caused by accidents or viral diseases against which they have no immunity, or by infrequent access to medical care, which might occur at such times as when a military doctor accompanying warring troops is stationed nearby.

Vanessa has a way of writing that consistently draws readers into the never-ending drama of living on the edge. While the characters she portrays are diverse, relationships for the most part are affectionate and caring, as for instance, is evident in the admirably resilient mar-

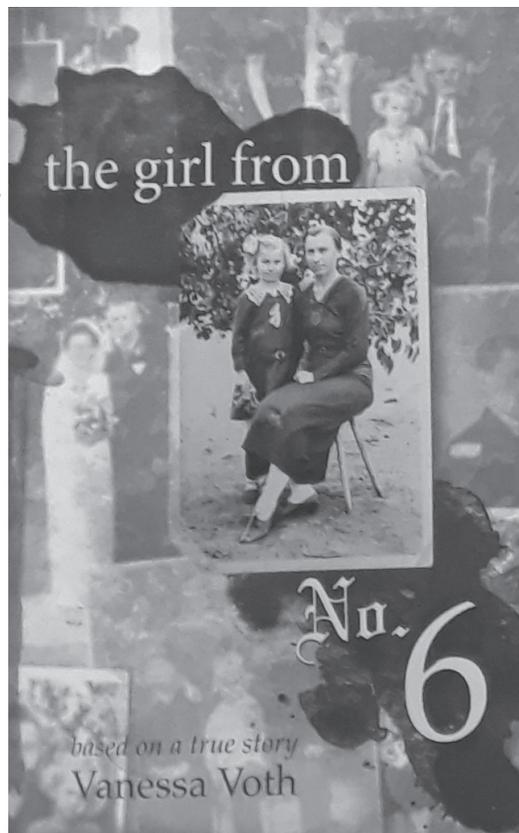
riage bond between Jacob (Jasch) and Maria. At the same time, Maria is not a patsy. Nor does she shy away from conflict as when her non-believing Jacob wants nothing to do with the church nor its judgmental members, and seeks to forbid her from participating. To which, eyes flashing, Maria lets him know that he is her husband, not her dictator.

Such differences notwithstanding, Maria remains affectionately attached to the church and participates as permitted in its ministries – although not without restrictions, since she has married outside of the church.

Difficulties of new beginnings are not ignored, even with the gradual improvement in village life. The introduction of electricity of course allows for modern conven-

iences. The village cooperative store in time offers an impressive inventory of goods, including a wide selection of fabrics and laces so mothers can sew clothes for their families and, especially, elaborately adorned wedding dresses.

Jacob often is seen as conflicted. Living in a face-to-



face community, he much prefers his solitude, or at most, small-group activities, since he finds church services boring and irrelevant. To manage his nagging stress levels, Jacob finds relief in smoking, or at the end of his working day, in a glass of whisky.

Most troubling for Jacob is the inconsistent behaviour of church members. He insists that it is possible to be a good man without adherence to the church and its belief systems. His tenuous connection with many villagers descends into a deepening crisis when one night someone breaks into his carpenter shop and steals some wood and tools, and he discovers that a deacon in the church was the intruder. When later the deacon confesses to the break-in and offers to compensate Jacob for the loss, Jacob's incredulity is strained to the breaking point.

However real their spiritual differences are, Jacob and Maria progressively develop an evident deep level of mutual trust. Maria is the one person with whom Jacob is comfortable sharing his struggles and vulnerability. In response, Maria spares no occasion to express affection and marital solidarity, often in very physical ways.

Economic conditions in Village No. 6 are primitive, with limited opportunities for gainful employment. As a result, all members of the family must work to contribute to family maintenance, either by gardening, milking cows, running errands, or doing some of the innumerable tasks that want attention in these pioneer conditions. Nevertheless, village life also yields up bountiful social rewards as Jacob and Maria raise their four children, Gredel, Erwin, Sylvia and Angie, in this setting.

Although Jacob becomes an acceptably skilled carpenter, his employment remains tenuous. When yet again his work comes to an end – he has been making coffins – he confides to Maria with an air of defeat that the time has come to join many other Paraguayan Mennonites in their trek to Canada, and especially so, as their oldest child and her husband have already settled in the new land. With the promise of a job in Richmond, BC, the decision to emigrate is confirmed.

Vanessa movingly narrates how huge a decision it is for Jacob and Maria and their children to take leave of everything they have ever known, to sever those many precious social connections and move to a new country, where everything, including the language and the climate, will make for a stiff adjustment time.

Eventually the Loewen family settles in Abbotsford, where Jacob finds employment with Columbia Kitchen Cabinets. Most touchingly, Vanessa narrates how after many years of observing Maria's patient and consistently

faithful living, Jacob too embraces faith in Christ, and shortly afterward is baptized into the King Road MB Church.

In the final chapters of the story, life in BC for the Loewens is close to idyllic. They have a nice home, a church they enjoy being part of, an amiable social life and a growing number of grandchildren. Alas, the joy does not last long. On a much anticipated bus tour through BC, Jacob experiences a severe stroke during their stop in Prince George and is left severely incapacitated. Tenderly, the family looks after Jacob, who is now living in an Abbotsford care home. His health deteriorates, and a second stroke further debilitates him. When the anticipated death comes, Maria is inconsolable in her grief, but also relieved that her dear Jacob's earthly travail is over.

This book is a page-turner. At least this reader hopes that Vanessa Voth will not wait too long before she continues with her winsome storytelling.



Vanessa Voth reading from her book, *The Girl from No. 6*.
Photo: Julia M. Toews

Tribute to Hugo Friesen

By Robert Martens

Hugo Friesen, born in Manitoba in 1930, was the second of four children of Cornelius and Maria Friesen, recent Russian Mennonite immigrants to Canada. When he was 3, his family moved to Greendale, BC. Hugo graduated from Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Yarrow, BC, and went on to study at Tabor and Goshen Colleges. While living in the United States, he met and fell in love with Jean Wismer. Their marriage resulted in a lifelong partnership.

Hugo taught at Yarrow's Sharon Mennonite Collegiate from 1955 to 1963, serving as principal for five years. He and his family subsequently worked for Mennonite Central Committee in Hong Kong from 1963 to 1966. After returning to Canada, Hugo taught in Maple Ridge before becoming principal of Mennonite Educational Institute in 1969; he continued his career there until 1989.

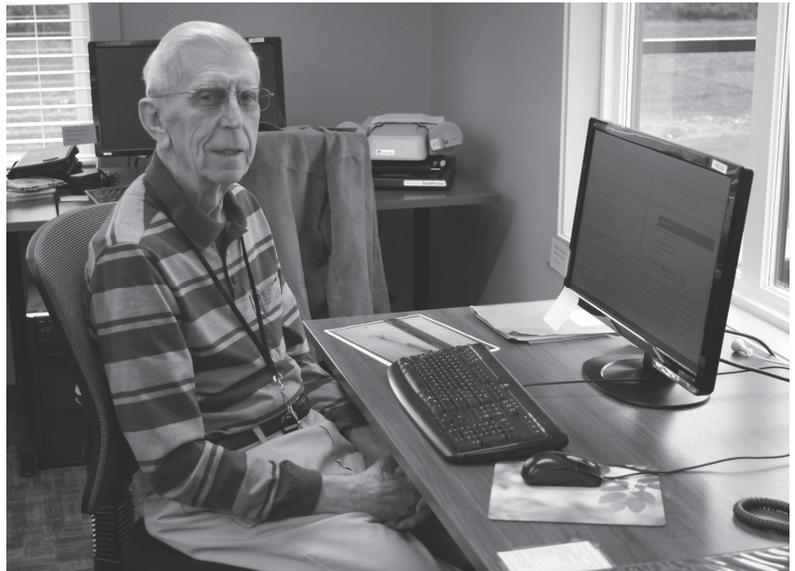
In autumn 1987 Hugo became involved in an effort to organize a British Columbia Mennonite archives. After another term with MCC from 1989 to 1993, this time in Akron, Pennsylvania, and New Hamburg, Ontario, Hugo and Jean returned to Abbotsford, where Hugo served as archivist at the Mennonite Historical Society of BC for twelve years. Hugo Friesen died February 24, 2019.

These are the bare facts. Hugo, with his quiet manner and solid work ethic, was much loved at the Mennonite Historical Society. I knew him as teacher and principal when I was a student at Sharon Mennonite Collegiate, and remember him as a man of unfailing decency.

Jennifer Martens, office and volunteer manager at MHSBC, delivered the following tribute at the Society's 2019 annual general meeting. It has been slightly edited for publication.

Hugo Friesen: This volunteer

- became involved in the 1980s with the early attempts to organize a Mennonite archives in the province, and after the fall of 1987, became the archivist at the MHSBC.
- coordinated all of the activities in the archives in its early years, including supervising volunteers, organizing, cataloguing, and classifying archival materials,



Hugo Friesen volunteering at the MHSBC.

Photo: Diane Hiebert

assisting with genealogical research, and representing the Society at regional meetings of the BC Archives Association.

- transitioned the MHSBC from being open half-day days to full days.
- personified the attributes of service, being generous with genealogical research assistance to anyone who needed help: he personified volunteerism, and life-long learning.
- set a high standard of public service with his valuable contributions at the MHSBC archives, and has left a rich legacy of public service to the Mennonite community in the province.
- together with his wife Jean (who also volunteered for the Society for a number of years, and helped to create the rich archival collection that we enjoy today) was awarded an honorary lifetime membership by the MHSBC board in 2016.
- enjoyed nature adventures with his family, reading, and stamp collecting.
- was counted as a dear friend, and we all knew and loved him.

Mary Ann Quiring, MHSBC office assistant, spoke at Hugo's memorial.

My life's journey first intersected with Hugo's in 1983 when we worked on the South Abbotsford Church history book. The committee worked for several months

...continued page 31.

Roots and Branches

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editing the book. We all worked very well together.

It was a few years later when I went to the Mennonite Historical Society of BC office in Garden Park Tower. The archives had been there a few years with Hugo as archivist. In 1998 I became a volunteer. In 2002 I was hired as the office manager and worked alongside Hugo. During this time, I came to appreciate Hugo's calm demeanour, his dedication to the archives and his graciousness to being called upon for many reasons. On one such occasion I called his suite (he and Jean were living in Garden Park) and Jean answered, saying he was in the woodworking room. I trundled downstairs to find him working on some wood projects and enjoyed a tour of the shop before I got him to sign the cheques.

Hugo personified the attributes of service, volunteerism, and long-term dedication. He coordinated the activities in the archives in its early years, including organizing, cataloguing and classifying archival materials, and represented the Society at the BC Archives Association. We also worked together preparing displays on various themes in the hallways; these were always of great interest to the many visitors. He was also willing to open up the archives to those wishing to do their genealogy research, often on Saturdays, when we were normally closed. It was during the early years that several of us with Hugo decided to try to extend our hours from half days to full days. Under Hugo's leadership, many volunteers helped to create the rich archival collection that we enjoy today.

From 2005 until 2018 Hugo continued to volunteer on Thursdays, working on databases and translating old Gothic handwritten documents, a difficult task that he and Jean worked at together. Hugo set a high standard of service with his much-appreciated contributions at the MHSBC and has left a rich legacy of public service to the Mennonite community.

I am proud and blessed to have called him a friend.

Artist statement from Julia M. Toews on her photo exhibit, *If I Survey the Ground I Tread*

Travel photos taken while looking down. The title is taken from the hymn 'I Sing the Mighty Power of God' by Isaac Watts (1674-1748). These are images of things often overlooked, objects not usually noticed. Yet, when one takes a closer look, one can often see hidden intricacies, structures, or perhaps beauty.

Julia M. Toews' photograph exhibit, *If I Survey the Ground I Tread*, is on from April 4 to May 15 at the Mennonite Heritage Museum .



Above:
"Reflection," on the Vltava River, Prague,
Czech Republic, September 2016.
Photo: Julia M. Toews



Left:
"Foundation," the corner of a Mennonite
house built in 1853, in former Mennonite
Colony, Chortiza, October 2010.
Photo: Julia M. Toews

Please see the artist statement on page 31.