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Roots and Branches

Periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

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

"Strassbourg." Artist: Gareth Brandt. Rosetta window, main cathedral of Strassbourg, France.

See note on page 2.

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Editorial

The Age of the Self

By Robert Martens

We live in an age that accentuates the moment. The individual. The self. An age in which history, stories, are forgotten. Lessons unlearned, and mistakes repeated.

Voices from the past struggle to be heard in the current mood of "just do it." In this issue of *Roots and Branches*, we attempt, in our very small way, to counter that trend. These pages feature stories told by the people who lived them. A doctor in Molotschna. A troubled youth growing up in Ufa. A Mennonite conscript taken prisoner by the French. A Mennonite conscript who refuses to engage in violence.

These people lived, loved, endured, dealt with the horrors and routines of their time. It is our hope that these voices speak to you, soul to soul.

Mennonite Museum Hiring Announcement

By Richard Thiessen
September 12, 2019

We are pleased to announce that we offered the position of Museum Educator to Jenny Bergen and she accepted. The position started on October 1, 2019. The Museum Educator will develop and deliver a dynamic program of experiential learning, ensuring that the Museum's collections will serve as a learning resource for all ages. She will strengthen the relationship between the Museum, the Mennonite Historical Society of BC, and various groups, including schools, churches, and community organizations. Jenny will be an outstanding asset to our team here at the Museum and we look forward to her contribution.

Artist Statement about the Front Cover Painting

By Gareth Brandt

"Strassbourg" – This picture is the rosetta window in the main cathedral of Strassbourg, France. Strassbourg was a progressive city during the Reformation that welcomed a free exchange of goods as well as ideas. Every Anabaptist leader of note was in the city at one time or another. Many sought refuge, others became prominent civic employees (Pilgram Marpeck), some came to learn, and still others came to preach. Melchior Hoffman picked up some Anabaptist ideas here from Swiss and German brothers and sisters who were present and took them back to his Dutch homeland, forming a unique branch of the Anabaptist movement. Strassbourg was an important city for the Anabaptists.

For a time in the 20th century, Mennonite World Conference appropriately had their head office in the city. The colourful, round rosetta window symbolizes for us both the safety which many Anabaptists of the 16th century sought and also the varied global expression of Anabaptism today.

Upcoming Events

Gallery Opening: "Mennonite Gals Can Paint: Watercolour & Acrylic Paintings"

Mennonite Heritage Museum
Sat. Feb 8, 2020 at 2pm
Featuring the work of Marilyn Vooys and Irene Enns. Free event, bring friends! Exhibit runs until March 21, 2020.

MHSBC Writers Workshop with Melody Goetz

Mennonite Heritage Museum
Sat. Feb. 22, 2020, 9:30am to 12:30pm
Limited to 15 registrants. See www.mhsbc.com for details. MHSBC members early bird price by Feb. 7: $40; after Feb. 7: $45. Future members: $50.

Spring Films at the Museum with host Dr. Harold C. Ratzlaff.

Starting Mar. 17, 2020
Films on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 1:30pm. More information to follow.

MHSBC Annual General Meeting

Ricky's Country Restaurant
32080 Marshall Road, Abbotsford
Fri. Apr. 17, 2020 at 1 pm
All MHSBC members are encouraged to attend for voting. Renew your membership now to get your voting card. For details visit www.mhsbc.com. The MHSBC Research Centre will be closed at the Museum location for most of the day on April 17 to allow volunteers and staff to attend.

Estate Planning Seminar

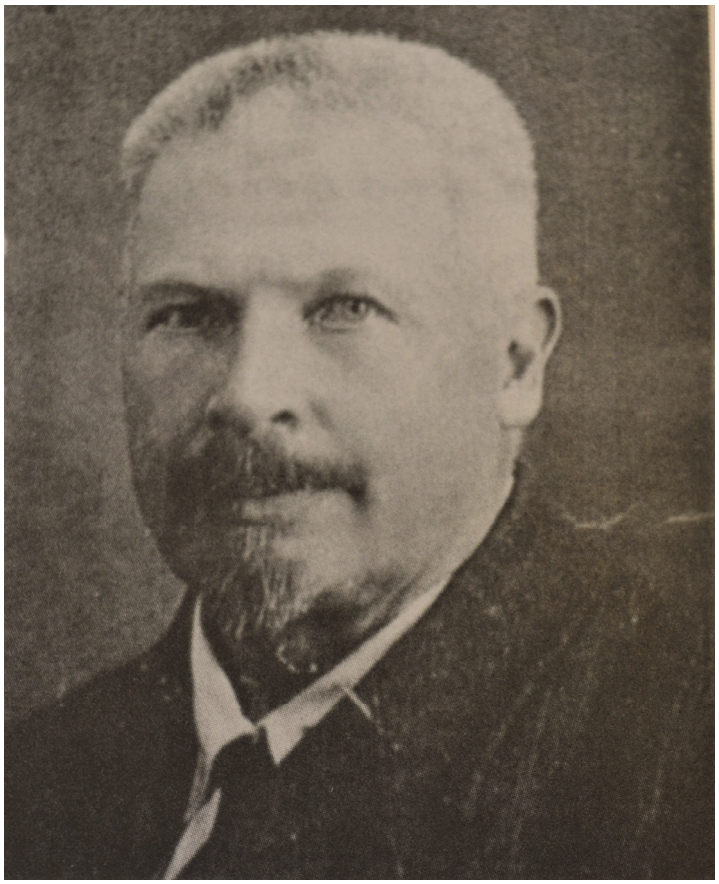
Thurs. Apr. 16 , 2020 at 7pm
Visit www.mhsbc.com to register.

Pier 21: The Musical

Matsqui Centennial Auditorium,
Fri. Apr. 24, 2020 at 7pm
Presented by the Mennonite Historical Society of BC and the Canadiana Musical Theatre Company. For ticket info see www.mhsbc.com, or call 604-853-6177. This musical will be held in conjunction with the MHM's "New Footsteps in Canada" Gallery Exhibit. Share your immigration story on a luggage tag to be part of the exhibit! Email Jenny Bergen for details: jenny.bergen@mennonitemuseum.org

A Molotschna Physician Reflects on Midwifery in 1907

Introduced and translated by John B. Toews



Dr. Erich Tavonius. Source: "Als Ihre Zeit Erfüllt War," Quiring & Bartel, p. 79

Erich Tavonius was born in Russia's Kuban region on October 3, 1872. His mother was the daughter of a German pharmacist named Wetterholz; his father, a Swedish military physician serving in the Russian army. With the premature death of his father, his mother, aged 44, and her five children moved to Dorpat, Estonia, where young Erich studied in the local Gymnasium*. In 1890 he was admitted to the University of Dorpat where he graduated with high honours as a medical doctor in 1895. Following hospital service in the Ukrainian province of Poltava he was hired to head the Muntau hospital in the Molotschna settlement. In 1904 he left to study for an eye, ear, nose and throat specialty at the University of Königsberg (now Kaliningrad, Russia) in the Baltics. Upon his return to Muntau in 1906 he spearheaded the founding of the Morija Deaconess Home and nurses training school in Neu-Halbstadt. Mobilized in 1915, he finally returned to Muntau in 1918 only to face revolution, civil war, famine and widespread disease. Subject to heart disease, he barely survived a bout with murine typhus in 1920 and the flu in 1923. He was planning to travel to Germany to seek treatment for his heart problems when he was struck down by a fever and subsequently succumbed to a heart attack on April 29, 1927.*[1]

Among the Mennonites of the region he was noted for his deeply Christian character, his compassion and his progressive thinking in the field of medicine. Perhaps a measure of his stature came from the 5,000 persons attending his burial service, the two and one-half hour public procession viewing his coffin, and even by the four black horses pulling his funeral hearse.[2]

Our mental images of Russian Mennonite life in the early twentieth century is usually one of prosperity and well-being. Some call it a "golden age" and in many ways it was that, with sizeable land holdings, factories, flour mills and imposing buildings of every sort. In addition, institutions like hospitals, a deaconess home, a school for the mute and hearing impaired, and a mental hospital suggest a well-rounded social conscience. Schools and literacy were held in high regard. Yet, somewhat ironically, actual hospitals and resident doctors seemed rather late in coming. In the Halbstadt district the first hospital, Muntau, opened as a privately funded institution in 1889. The Ohrloff hospital, also privately funded, began operations in 1910. As Tavonius observes in his article, the Chortitza district was more progressive, building a hospital and doctors' residence in 1870 and appointing two qualified midwives in 1902.

Tavonius had one particular concern – childbirth. Decades earlier the diary writer Jacob Epp recorded five family births supervised by four different midwives between 1860 and 1871. These were simply village women who, because they were female and assisted at other deliveries, were deemed to be qualified. It was only late in 1870 that he learned of a "trained Russian midwife from Voronzovk."[3] *Not long after she had assisted in the birth of his first child by his second wife, Katarina,*[4] *he wrote, "Oh, how we need trained midwives; it is amazing how the most uneducated and least knowledgeable think they know so much."*[5] *In the case of a complicated birthing the midwife alone stood between life and death. There was no backup in terms of an experienced doctor or a hospital. Since sterile techniques were unknown, childbed fever (puerperal fever) claimed many victims.*

Adding to the childbirth crisis was the fact that a

Mennonite mother might bear ten to twelve children, at least judging by the twenty-nine year span of Epp's diary. Since prenatal and postnatal care were often nonexistent, the toll on the mother's personal health must have been severe. With the construction of hospitals and employment of qualified physicians, birthing for women near these institutions was a less terrifying experience. Nevertheless, in outlying villages women were still dependent on local midwives whose skills were learned "on the job" and who possessed little or no formal medical training.[6] In 1907 Tavonius still had doubts about their competence. Molotschna was probably the wealthiest of all Mennonite settlements in the early twentieth century. One wonders why community leaders did not address this most crucial of issues earlier in the story of the Molotschna Colony.

Hospital in Muntau. Source: "Damit Es Nicht Vergessen Werde." Gerhard Lohrenz, p. 79

[1]"Doktor Erich Tavonius," *Unser Blatt*, Vol. 2, No. 10 (July 1927): 307-309; "Über Dr. Tavonius Krankheit und Tod," *Der Bote*, Vol. 4, No. 24 (15 June 1927): 5.
[2]"Dr. E. Tavonius," *Der Bote*, Vol. 4, No. 23 (8 June 1927): 4.
[3]"Dr. Tavonius' Begräbnis," *Der Bote*, Vol. 4, No. 24 (15 June 1927): 5.
[4]Jacob Epp Diary (Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba), December 17, 1870.
[5]Jacob Epp Diary (Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba), December 8, 1870.
[6]An interesting case of foresight and dedication involved Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Warkentin. Deeply troubled by the lack of care for mothers in childbirth, Mrs. Warkentin left the family for Vienna where she studied midwifery. Upon her return the couple used their private resources to build a hospital with a 35 to 45 bed capacity. It still stands today as a regional medical centre.

Dr. Erich Tavonius, "The Midwife Problem in the Molotschna," *Friedensstimme,* Vol. 5, No. 6 (1907): 73-74.

The midwife issue is a crucial one in the Molotschna [Colony]. The "Old Colony" [Chortitza] has solved this problem insofar that two to four villages combined to offer a midwife accommodation and a reasonable salary. As a consequence, competent midwives have been willing to move into the countryside. In the Molotschna a midwife cannot rely on a secure income and has to rely on private practice that often, especially, in the beginning years, does not generate enough income for a decent living.

There is often the need for a qualified midwife but under current conditions no one can risk moving into private practice. She might view midwifery as a part-time occupation much as a wheat farmer views gardening as a sideline. If a person cannot dedicate all her energy to a task nothing good and substantial will happen. It's time something was done about the midwife problem in the Molotschna.

I don't have to emphasize the importance of this profession. Those who recall former days can remember and relate the many deaths resulting from childbirth. In our day it does not happen that often. This does not mean women have become stronger but rather that they receive the proper prenatal care. In the past a simple old woman comforted and encouraged another woman in her hour of crisis. She cut the umbilical cord and helped to cleanse her. Yet the temptation to do something more in a difficult [obstetrical] case was often too great. What happened under those circumstances frequently harmed the woman. Only a well-trained midwife can determine and perform the correct procedures. The more knowledge and education she has, the better she can do her job.

The midwife profession is a difficult one. Much is expected and she must meet all those expectations. She must be strong, healthy, educated – that is to say well-schooled, knowledgeable and skilled in her work. She must be patient, self-sacrificing and devoted. These three characteristics are inconceivable without the firm moral solidity that only religion provides.

Where can those who have a God-given talent for such a profession and are passionate about it secure the necessary knowledge and training? Where shall our single and married women study since most of them do not know enough Russian to take a course in midwifery at Russian universities?

Instruction from individual doctors and midwives will always be inadequate regardless of how much time and effort is spent. Any training that is less than nine months is inadequate.

There is one outstanding, well-run midwifery school

whose head I know personally. I regard him very highly both as a doctor and teacher. The language of instruction is German. I'm thinking of the midwifery school at the Riga State Hospital. It is a private school and hence more expensive than state schools yet guarantees the same qualifications as most state schools.

It is cheaper if one studies abroad; for example, in Königsberg a nine-month course costs 200 rubles but the certificate from abroad is not recognized in Russia. Such persons have to take a midwifery exam at a Russian university and such "foreigners" are not exactly favoured by the professors. Furthermore you can't blame the foreigners if they are hesitant to accept Russian students. The midwifery schools are not profitable ventures but run at cost. They want their graduates to serve their own country. The "Russians" arrive [at these foreign schools] like [a swarm of] bees and carry the nectar across the borders.

"Oh, how we need trained midwives; it is amazing how the most uneducated and least knowledgeable think they know so much."

Since the Riga Midwifery School is not well known I will provide some information. It is licensed by the state and, following an entrance and a commission-administered final exam, confers a diploma "Midwife Second Level." The recipient has the right to practise anywhere in the Russian Empire, either in an urban or rural setting. With this diploma she can enter any position in state service. Such a diploma is ample for our needs and the rights it accords are sufficient to make the attainment of such a diploma most desirable. Yet the diploma is not the most important thing.

What do they teach in Riga? It is important to note that several doctors provide both theoretical and practical instruction. The students have to study intensely for nine months. The first three months they have a bit of leisure but then the hard work begins. Each student at the school has to be in charge of at least twenty births. During the last months they have to visit the homes of the poor and successfully preside over at least ten births. Naturally a doctor is always in attendance. For anyone who knows this business, such requirements constitute a good guarantee of the school's thoroughness. Such a practicum outside of the school is most commendable and not offered by some of the other schools….

Those who have not entirely completed or done well in the village school will find it difficult to follow the instruction. Several Mennonites from the Caucasus have been to the school and successfully completed the course. Our Molotschna village school training will probably suffice to provide a basis for further specialized training. Some Molotschna inhabitants want to raise the educational level of the village school and move towards a two-class system. God grant that this might be more than a pious wish! In France the midwife is called the *femme sage* – wise, intelligent woman. How fitting! That is the way it is or should be. The specialized training of a midwife can only build upon a solid foundation of general knowledge. If the best, most able and most educated women dedicate themselves to this profession, the midwife will gain much more respect and have more influence than has been the case until now. It is their obligation to keep the mother, the crown of our homes, healthy. What a tragedy when the mother of eight or ten children dies in childbirth. How terribly bereft are the children, the father, the entire household. How difficult it is to restore order and tranquillity to such a home. Even with the best care puerperal fever will occur but only as a rare exception. When our women approach childbirth they are like soldiers going forth to battle. In real life not all soldiers get into firefights yet when women go into labour they all do exactly that.

Molotschna inhabitants have given so much to the Red Cross and to wounded soldiers. Can't they give anything for the welfare of their own women? If impoverished married or single women want to become midwives, can't we give or lend them the necessary funds in order for them to obtain good training in Riga? Is it not possible for the villages to get together and pay their midwives a fixed salary? That way they recruit competent, resident midwives who will not leave for a better-paying private practice elsewhere. A fairer distribution of midwives will result, whereas in private practice they may congregate in one locality and leave other regions without a midwife.

The reasons I recommend the Riga Midwifery School relate to the German language instruction and the fact that the school is well equipped and has good teaching personnel. Finally, I know Dr. Keilmann personally and am convinced that a great deal can be learned there.

Dr. E. Tavonius, Colony Doctor in Muntau

Tavonius Responds to Mennonite Relief from America

Dr. Erich Tavonius to most honoured Mr. Herman Neufeld, Muntau, Molotschna, June 10, 1923. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, Vol. 46, No. 38, p. 10.

Translated by John B. Toews

Personnel of the Muntau hospital. Standing, left to right: Helena Kröker, Dr. Tavonius, Käthe Neufeld, Marie Wiens, Anna Töws, Unknown. Seated: Margareta Friesen, Käthe Neumann, Agatha Berg, Tina Boldt. Source: "Als Ihre Zeit Erfüllt War," Quiring & Bartel, p. 79

During the last few days we received a food parcel from Ekaterinoslav from you. I don't know whether it comes from you or some other donor. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts. During the time when American [Mennonite] Relief was active here I received 2½ food drafts and one textile parcel. This was a great help to me since I have no relatives in America.

Since American aid is soon coming to an end, I simply must say that it was a magnificent gesture. God was so gracious in allowing this aid to come to us – bread coming to us across the great waters. It was a magnificent effort not only in terms of the amount of relief but also the manner and order of its dispersion. So many small streams and springs have come together to unite in a single river only to be separated by a complicated distribution system – that required a great deal of administrative and organizational effort.

The distribution of food among the people will probably end in a month. The kitchens have already closed. We have enough American drugs and bandages to last us half a year since we were are very careful in using them. The sick arrive from everywhere – walking or by cow- and horse-drawn wagons. All want medicines and we try our best to provide them – sparingly. We are more fortunate than other hospitals since we have friends in America who have sent us extra supplies. Unfortunately some things were stolen enroute, especially narcotics, which we particularly need.

We operate every day and the nurses are very busy, as are our other employees; after all we are cultivating twenty *dessiatines* of land. This is to ensure our winter food supply. They [the employees] have not received a wage in eight months and will probably be paid with grain. In the northeast corner of our district, ours is the only hospital out of four that is still operational. The number of our beds and personnel has been reduced so we have had to work all the harder to keep up with the demands. Earlier on we had to do without our baths and now we lack [disinfectant] alcohol – but we are managing. Hopefully we don't run out of chloroform, ether, iodine and morphine. The condition of our surgical instruments could cause us great aggravation or bring us to tears but that is the situation and we have to adapt. As long as we can serve our suffering fellow humans peaceably and even during the freezing winter we will do so. It does not help to complain about the last three years and we comfort ourselves with the thought that this too shall pass and we will be able to emigrate. If God so wills he will open the door to another land here on earth. Otherwise our body will end up in the cemetery, which has been so devastated that not even the gravestones and iron crosses have been spared. Our souls however will be in the other world where the events in this world cannot touch us. It is so sad that we are so impoverished that we are unable to help others. Maybe it's a punishment for not being more generous in the past.

With warmest greetings,
Dr. E. Tavonius

The Unusual Mennonite (Non)Colony in Ufa

By Robert Martens

The Russian Mennonite "Ufimer" were an atypical bunch. Their settlements located near the major city of Ufa did not constitute a proper Mennonite colony at all – farms were scattered, often remote, and subject to thievery and vandalism. And the central village of Davlekanovo (accent on the third syllable) consisted of a Mennonite quarter, with the remainder of the town quite cosmopolitan. Muslims, Jews, Orthodox, Lutherans, and Mennonites lived cheek to jowl in the business section of Davlekanovo. Gerhard Hein writes that "It had its Mennonite quarter on the one side of the Samara-Ufa railroad and the colourfully mixed business quarter on the other side where Mennonites lived side by side with Russians and Tartars. Here one saw, next to a Russian Orthodox Church a Russian Baptist Church, next to a Moslem mosque a Mennonite church" (Hein et al. 16).

This was a village which featured an annual fair, with stalls, a circus, and a merry-go-round. It was a place where Mennonites were nudging themselves into the Russian mainstream. Here, even the Indigenous, though misunderstood and condescended to, were part of the larger community. Peter Mierau writes, "The Baschkirs are most hospitable. Upon entering their homes one is invited to tea. In summer they served Kumys, a refreshing drink of fermented mares' milk. The shepherd boys as well as the seasonal labourers came from these villages. Very quickly the German settlers, particularly the younger ones, learned to speak the Baschkir language. This was highly practical in business transactions as well as shopping at the bazaars" (Hein et al. 64-5).

Beginnings

The story of Mennonites in the Russian province of Ufa (accent on the final syllable), a small settlement that lasted only a few years, is not well known. Ufa, some 1,400 kilometres east of Moscow on the European side of the Ural Mountains, was situated on the Trans-Siberian Railway and consequently was a hub for business and communication; today it is one of the larger cities in Russia and is the capital city of the "republic" of Bashkortostan, a subject state of Moscow. Its climate, however, is subject to extremes of hot and cold, and thus Ufa was a late choice for settlement among Russian Mennonites. Land in more prime locations, though, was becoming far too expensive for the young and the landless. Farming around Ufa became an option, especially since Russian landowners, who sometimes experienced financial difficulties after the emancipation of the serfs, felt forced to sell off sections of their land.

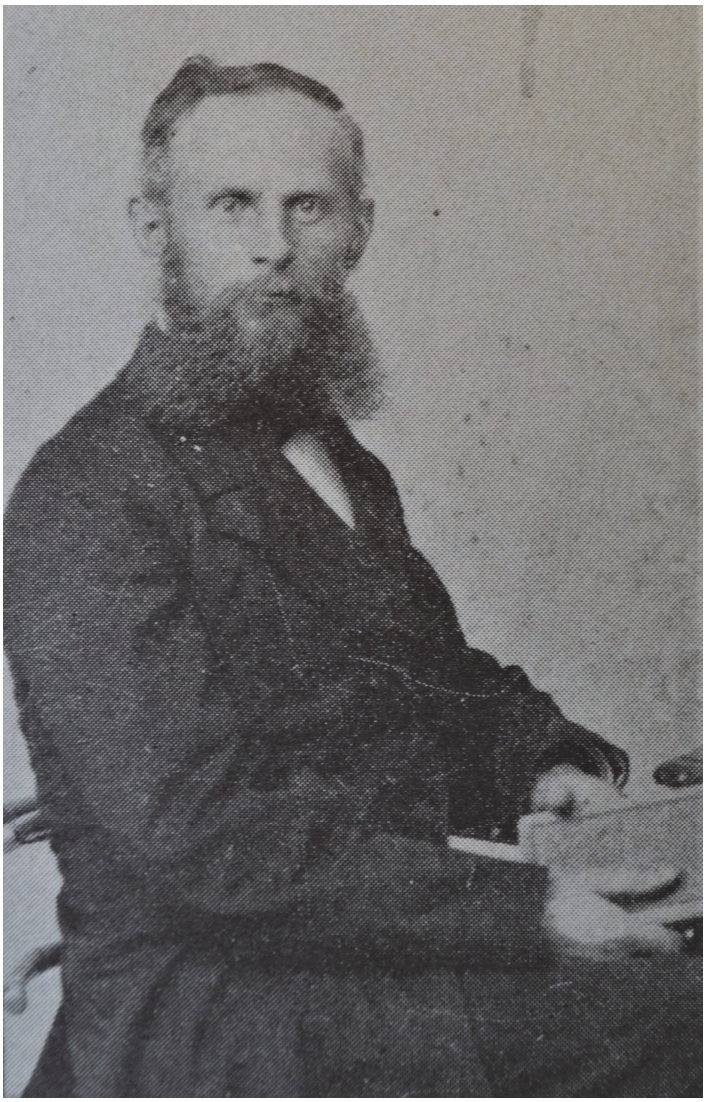
Among the first to arrive in the area, however, was at least one estate owner, Franz Abramovich Klassen. By all accounts he was a benevolent and affable man, and his home quickly became a meeting and transit point for Mennonite newcomers. Njuta Fast writes, "The Tartars called him 'Father' (Ataj Franzus Abramowitsch). He also helped his 'Brothers,' the Mennonite settlers. Newcomers found hospitality in his home until they could find a

Armenschule in Beresowka, Ufa (Davlekanovo) Colony. Source: "Als Ihre Zeit Erfüllt War," Quiring & Bartel, p. 141.

place of their own" (Hein et al. 21).

A "school for the poor"

From the start, the Ufimer emphasized the need for education. Franz Klassen was instrumental in helping provide a start-up for an *Armenschule*, or school for the poor, located in the village of Berezovka. In reality, the name of the school was a misnomer. It did provide education to impoverished Mennonites and Lutherans at almost no cost, but was actually a boarding school for the children of rich and poor alike. Klassen provided the land and the school opened in 1901. Mennonites were deeply grateful, writes Njuta Fast. "Winter presented its particular difficulties, one being the arrival of the much feared snow storms (Burane). The distance and the poverty of the Colonists often prevented them from picking up their children. One admired the courage of the parents who, against so many odds sent their children to the boarding school, but necessity drove them to it" (Hein et al. 23).



Jacob Johann Martens—teacher, preacher in Ufa in 1902.
Source: "Als Ihre Zeit Erfüllt War," Quiring & Bartel, p. 141

Klassen's close partner in this endeavour was Jakob Johann Martens, a teacher, preacher, and evangelist who was born in Muntau, attended Bible school in Basel, and had taught for some years in Zagradovka. Jakob and his wife, Katherine (Siemens), were hired as houseparents for the new school. Realistically this meant that they managed the institution, and when Klassen left for America in 1905, Jakob became the new principal. Martens was a talented, charismatic individual who never left a home, Mennonite or Muslim, without saying a prayer. His son Petrus writes, "For father the hard blow came with the death of his beloved wife and co-worker. For three years he worked without a helpmate. Personal prayer helped him to find his way through the mists of misunderstanding and unpleasantness with his staff. When all the others were asleep he would at times become louder than intended in his praying" (Hein et al. 25). Martens directed the school until war and famine forced its closure. He contracted typhus in 1922 and would have survived, but died of malnutrition due to food scarcity.

The school building was divided by a wall down the middle. On one side was the classroom, kitchen, dining room, and hall; on the other, living quarters for the teacher and his family. Beneath the roof were bedrooms for the pupils. Above the entrance to the school, a sign was posted: "For Everyone" (Hein et al. 22).

Rapid growth

With the extreme climate and lack of infrastructure, life around Ufa was initially exceedingly difficult. Some farmers prospered, but agriculture as a whole never really took off. It seems that Ufimer Mennonites were discovering the benefits of urbanization. Gerhard Hein cites his father's memoir: "'People spoke of Ufa and said we ought to go there too, and buy a portion of land. That could be something for us.' Things did change, but not for the better. 'When the first winter arrived with its storms,' father continues, 'I would often ask myself: Lord, why did you allow us to come here?' … After a few difficult years of farming the path led us into the merchant profession in Dawlekanowo where our situation improved. 'Dawlekanowo is a place of brisk activity, even in the area of school and church,' father said without much explanation" (Hein et al. 12-13).

Until the outbreak of the First World War, the village of Davlekanovo saw extraordinary growth. Flour mills,

agricultural machine shops, warehouses, and diverse enterprises sprouted up in the business quarter. Two large churches, Old Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren, coexisted peaceably. Preachers, like teacher Karl Friedrichsen, served both denominations, the *Kirchengemeinde* and the Mennonite Brethren Church. For a few brief years, a small Bible school served as a training ground for ministers.

A high school

Amidst this flurry of development and economic prosperity, Ufimer were keen to establish a high school. The *Armenschule* in the remote village of Berezovka was a good beginning but clearly inadequate for the community's future. Hence in 1908 construction began on a *Zentralschule*, or high school, in Davlekanovo. Kornelius Neufeld, educated in Switzerland and England, became the school's first principal.

In Russian Mennonite terms, the high school was cutting edge. Standards were high. Theatre was performed in both Russian and German. A choir and orchestra presented works as sophisticated as Felix Mendelssohn's oratorio *Paulus*. Johann P. Perk, the music director, is quoted by Kaethe Klassen as saying, "I will play Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata until the farmer behind the plough whistles it" (Hein et al. 33). Among the teaching staff was F.C. Thiessen, who insisted on gymnastics classes over the objections of some parents who confused it with dancing. Thiessen, who would later teach at the Mennonite Educational Institute in Abbotsford, BC, succeeded Kornelius Neufeld as principal of the *Zentralschule* in 1911.

Females were in charge of the younger classes. A new wing was built in 1911; both wings included four classrooms and a laboratory. Most remarkable, though, might be the fact that the school was coeducational, unique at the time in Mennonite settlements. Njuta Fast quotes Peter M. Friesen as saying, "Until now (1910) the coeducational system is most successful. The girls train the boys" (Hein et al. 27).

Catastrophe

After the Revolution, Ufa became a battle zone for Reds and Whites. Famine ensued. The Soviets eventually won the day. Individuals were arrested in the midnight hours, and few returned. Some Mennonite families were deported to Siberia; others fled to Siberia, only to be discovered even there and thrown into prison camps.

Gerhard Hein cites a memoir by Red Cross nurse Jenny Mayer: "In 1931 a severe Pogrom broke out in Dawlekanowo. Like lightning out of the blue a troop of police seized the last German colonists and Mennonite families, who yielded quietly to their fate. The many Baschkirs and Tartars who were also seized fought in despair to the shedding of blood. A thousand or more Mennonites were herded into cattle cars and sent to Central Siberia to settle in the forests there" (Hein et al. 49-50).

Hein adds, "It was significant and deeply moving that the G.P.U. would permit a spontaneous religious farewell ceremony at the railroad station. Upon the departure of the long double train the Christians in the cattle cars sang in greatest solemnity the wonderful song, 'Nearer my God to thee.' … In total silence, our eyes streaming with tears, those of us who were left behind watched the train leave. My old pastor was parted that day from eight members, mostly young, of his family whom he was never to see again for he was exiled to Siberia" (Hein et al. 50).

Within the whirlwind of Soviet atrocities, ironies abound. Dr. Gerhard Neufeld was arrested and disappeared forever into the Gulag. His son Ernest went on to become a professor of mathematics at the University of Ufa.

Note: The reader will notice the variation in spelling in place names; e.g., Davlekanovo, Dawlekanowo; Bashkir, Baschkir. The use of "w" and "sch" reflect Germanic spellings.

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"Ufa." *Wikipedia*. 2018. www.en.wikipedia.org

Orchestra led by Johann P. Perk, music director of the high school. Source: "Als Ihre Zeit Erfüllt War," Quiring & Bartel, p. 142

The *Armenschule* principal, Jakob Johann Martens, was my great-grandfather. He surely would have crossed paths with Peter Herman Epp, who grew up in Berezovka. His son, Peter A. Epp, has compiled a life story/ memoir of his father. In that account, Peter A. Epp writes that he had a difficult relationship with his father, and speculates that trauma may have been the cause:

My father, Peter Herman Epp, was born on March 26, 1904 in Berezovka, in central Russia near the Ural Mountains (the closest large city was Ufa). His father, Herman Peter Epp, was a wealthy farmer and businessman. While my father was not a storyteller in the same class as my mother (Mary Liesch), he did talk about his childhood in Russia and his life as a young man in the prairies of Canada. As you will see, he suffered many hardships in Russia including the death of his mother when he was 12 and neglect from his father.

My grandfather (Herman) was largely absent from his son's life, spending all his time with work or partying with his friends. Dad related that the only gift he ever received from his father was a package of tobacco. He never mentioned getting a hug or a kind word. My impression was that my grandfather saw my father simply as convenient, unpaid labour.

It seems that my grandfather was one of the wealthier farmers and businessmen in the area. When the Revolution was over, he was stripped of all his possessions by the Bolsheviks and sent into exile to Archangel, Siberia, where he was apparently robbed and beaten to death on New Year's Day, 1934. It would have been the ultimate irony if the new shoes my father had sent him from Canada precipitated his death. In a "thank you" letter to my father he commented that he didn't believe he could wear the shoes, because if he did people wouldn't give him any food when he went begging!

With this start in life, other traumatic experiences, and some peculiar cultural and religious attitudes about sexuality, my father became a damaged person who was not really prepared to be a husband or a father. As a result, his behaviour towards me during puberty and through the teenage years was perplexing and, even today, difficult to understand.

My father changed over the years and we reconciled not long before he passed away. He was a good, deeply religious man who cared about others and proved that many times over especially in the last few years of his working life when he was employed by the City Central Mission in the Vancouver Downtown Eastside.

Peter Herman Epp: Story of a Life as Recounted by His Son, Peter A. Epp

Courtesy of Peter A. Epp and Dorothy Peters

The following account is in Peter Herman Epp's own words.

Narrative resumes in Russia (1918)
In the winter of 1918, when I was still 14 years old and the Russian Revolution was still raging with the Whites (anti-Communists) battling the Reds (Communists), my father asked me to take a sled of food to the front lines. The sled was loaded with food but I had been warned to leave it alone and that I might get shot if I ate any of it. Why I had not been provided with some provisions I will never know. There were some oats for the two horses (for water the horses ate snow), but I had almost nothing to eat for my journey and was very hungry and worried.

Late at night on the first day I saw some lights in the distance and as I got closer I saw it was a farmhouse. I was desperate so I knocked on the door and was welcomed in by a friendly German couple who fed me and the horses and got me a warm place to sleep. In the morning they gave me some more food for my journey and wished me luck. I was very grateful to them and now I sometimes wonder what they must have thought of a parent who would send such a young boy on a perilous journey without anything to eat!

A day and half later I finally got to the front lines and found an army officer who handled provisions for the soldiers there. I had been afraid that they would take my horses and I would have to walk back home, but they were very kind to me. They gave me food and extra provisions for the journey back. I finally got home about two days later lucky to be alive and not frozen to death. I can't remember if my father even thanked me, but my older sister Maria gave me a big hug and I felt better.

After his family moves to Siberia, Peter becomes hungry and hopeless
You know, Peter, after my father and two older sisters left for Siberia I was fortunate to find room and board with some Mennonite farmers in the area and worked there as a farmhand for about a year or so. These people were poor and we had little meat to eat, but I still remember the wonderful smell of fried potatoes and onions on the stove. All the small farmers struggled to survive

Peter Herman Epp. Photo courtesy of Peter A. Epp and Dorothy Peters

Note by Peter A. Epp: The years between 1918 and 1922 must have been chaotic and difficult for my father as well as grandfather. With the Russian Communists pretty much in control by the end of 1918 to 1920, the confiscation of property would have started with Grandfather probably losing his house and business in Davlekanovo and retreating to his farm in Berezovka. According to a booklet called *Ufa* that was produced as a result of a reunion of Mennonites from the region in Abbotsford that my father attended in July 1975, some Mennonites, Catholics and Lutherans apparently gathered in my grandfather's yard as late as 1922 trying to negotiate some sort of living agreement with the Bolsheviks that eventually failed, forcing some into exile in Siberia while other escaped to other parts of the world, including Canada. During this time there was also a great famine caused by drought and the confiscation of food by the Red and White armies that fought through the region. On top of that there was a typhus epidemic that, together with the famine, killed millions in Russia. Father never talked about this period so I can only guess at what went on. By this time his two older brothers would have already passed away and he would have been living with his two older sisters Maria and Susy along with his father.

since there had been a drought and poor crops for a couple of years. The Red and White armies also had taken a lot of the grain and livestock as they moved through the area. Then the Communists came and took the rest, though that didn't happen right away.

When food got very scarce, I got sick and couldn't work anymore. I guess I was probably half starved and undernourished. So, the farmers said that if I couldn't work then they couldn't feed me anymore and that I couldn't stay there any longer. Feeling very weak, sad and hopeless [I] started the long walk back to our farm. Along the way I encountered some nomads (Dad said "Cossacks") either Bashkirs or Tatars that took me in and nursed me back to health. They had a drink that they made from mare's milk called "kvass" that was very nourishing (and slightly alcoholic). I drank a lot of it and gradually got stronger.

So, Peter, the reason I am here today is because I was rescued by Muslims after being left to die by Mennonites.

Peter immigrates to Canada, all alone, at age 20

When I was feeling better again, I finished the long trek home to the farm. It was strange walking on the yard and finding no one there. I did eventually connect with some of the elders from the church who helped me get settled. Together with their help, trapping rabbits to make fur hats, and rebuilding an old farm wagon (that was my only inheritance), I scraped enough money together to buy a ticket to Canada (about $150) on a Canadian Pacific steamship. I remember going to Moscow to get some papers that I needed. I took the train to the Black Sea where I boarded the ship to Canada.

The year was 1924 and I was 20 years old. I had made it just in time since during the next few years the window to leave Russia and go to Canada closed. Relations between the two countries deteriorated and no more emigrants were allowed in for a long time.

On board ship I joined a bunch of other Mennonites in "steerage," the lowest and poorest part of the ship. There were no windows and it was very crowded, stuffy and smelly with poor sleeping arrangements and even worse food. At the time I did not realize that, since I had paid for my ticket, while my fellow passengers were travelling on credit, I was entitled to move upstairs to a berth. No one ever informed me of my status so I spent the whole two-week voyage in misery with the rest of the steerage passengers.

I believe our ship docked in Quebec City and I took a CP train to Langham, Saskatchewan, where I had relatives. So began my life in Canada. I thank God for my good fortune in finding my way to this wonderful country that has been so good to me over the years. While there were many difficulties ahead I always had faith and confidence that I would find my way through and that has been the case.[1]

Peter in Langham, Saskatchewan (c. 1924)

My relatives in Langham[2] were not that happy to see me and made that pretty clear to me very soon after I got there. I asked around and found an English farmer who

Note by Peter A. Epp: Why my father didn't go to Siberia with the rest of the family I can only guess at. What I do remember him saying was that he wound up working for room and board for a number of small farmers in the area. The Communists did not get to these small farms for a while since they were somewhat remote and so they were able to continue subsistence farming for a few years without being dispossessed.

Peter (third from left) and the travelling threshing crew (Saskatchewan, c. 1925?)

needed a farmhand. They turned out to be very nice, kind people who treated me very well. I got good food every day and got half of Saturday and all of Sunday off. The farm was close to a small river and I would often go there sit and think. It was very peaceful and quiet with the birds singing in the warm sunshine. I found a church I could go to and soon had some friends I could talk to.

After about a year I left this nice family to join a travelling threshing crew that was a common feature in the prairies at this time. During the grain harvest season that ran from late summer to the fall we would go from farm to farm with the threshing machine, wagons, horses and other equipment. We worked from dawn to dusk every day except Sunday. Accommodations could be a little rough at times but we got about five meals a day and were fairly well paid for the time.

I remember fooling around with the other guys with typical juvenile behaviour farting through our "Long John" underwear and lighting them with matches to see who could produce the biggest blue flame! I did this for a number of years, working for a farmer in the summer and then joining the threshing crews during the harvest season. During the winter months I tried to get some schooling.[3]

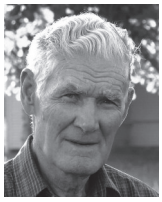
1 A search in Ancestry.ca did not reveal the ship and date in 1924 when Dad arrived in Quebec City. There were several ships that brought Russian Mennonites to Canada during the years from 1924 to 1929 (the last year that such trips were allowed by the Russian government). One of these ships was the CP ship Montclair. Apparently, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) had sent a number of people with financial resources to Russia to help the Mennonites get to Canada during that time. I suspect that my father got some help from these people as well. Searching the internet, I found a report of a family in 1924 taking the train from Moscow to Riga, Latvia, on the Black Sea [sic] where they boarded a small coastal steamer called the S.S. Marglen that took them to Southampton, England where they were quarantined and checked for illnesses and other problems. Some stayed there for a long time. Then this family boarded the CP ship S.S. Minnedosa for Quebec City, arriving sometime in July 1924. They then got on trains to their final destinations. It is quite possible that my father left from Riga, Latvia, as well but in his case went to Liverpool instead of Southampton.

2 Cousins, I believe.

3 Many years later, he would eventually finish high school in Yarrow, BC.

The Journeys of Peter Dueck

By Robert Martens



Source: MB Herald Oct. 2017

Someone said at one time: "It is not important where we come from but important where we are going." In light of eternity I agree, but after reading Anabaptist history, the Mennonites, their persecution, their move to Russia and other countries seeking religious freedom, nonresistance, has touched me. (Peter Dueck 2)

The life of Peter Dueck, who died 13 March 2017 in Chilliwack, might seem a familiar tale to those acquainted with Russian Mennonite history. Nonetheless, Peter Dueck's story stands out for its staggering twists and turns.

He was born in 1926 in Margenau, Ukraine, to Peter and Margarete Dueck (Dück). The family survived the Bolshevik Revolution, only to endure the terror perpetrated by Stalin's regime. Young Peter's father was expelled eastward by the Soviets in 1941 as German forces advanced into the USSR; he would never return. In 1943, the Dueck family fled the Soviet Union with the retreating Germans. From the frying pan into the fire, one might say, since Peter was conscripted by the German army in the dying days of the war and did not see his family again for many years.

After peace was declared, Peter Dueck spent several years as a prisoner of war, most of that time as a labourer in a French work camp, and eventually landed up in the refugee settlement at Gronau, Germany. Here he met Margaret "Gredel" Rempel. They married, and finally found refuge in Canada, settling in Greendale, BC. In 1956 Peter learned that his mother and siblings had been repatriated to the Soviet Union after World War II and were still alive. They were reunited in 1976.

The last decades of Peter Dueck's life were characterized by the relative placidity of the Western world. During that time, he wrote by hand a simple memoir that, although infused with black humour, lays bare the grief, love, terror and faith of his earlier life. This extraordinary document is part of the John B. Toews Collection at the Mennonite Historical Society of BC. (All following quotations are taken from that memoir, and are essentially unedited.)

Surviving the Soviet Union

One of Dueck's earliest memories is famine, artificially im-

posed on the Ukraine by the totalitarian Communist leadership – "to make the landowners join the collective farms," as Dueck puts it (2). His mother later told him that she knew of a family in which the father and thirteen children starved to death. In 1933 the Dueck family moved to the Caucasus region where employment and food were available, and where the parents were not forced into the punishing labour on collective farms. While still living in the Caucasus, son Peter witnessed a strange event: "One early morning I saw my parents kneel and pray. I was a bit confused. In school our teacher was mocking people who prayed to 'God that did not exist.' What should I think about my own parents?" (6)

In school our teacher was mocking people who prayed to 'God that did not exist.'

In 1938, at the height of Stalin's Great Terror, the Duecks moved back to their home village of Margenau where "with thousands others, again [we] were slaves of the collective farms" (6B). There was no time for childish play: "Boys 10 years and older were very valuable in the fields …"(6B). And everyone living there witnessed the Black Raven of the secret service scoop up able-bodied men to send them to torture, death, or labour camps. By 1939, says Dueck, many of the men from Margenau were in exile.

Surviving the German-Soviet war

In 1941 Hitler sent his armies into the Soviet Union. Information was strictly censored and hard to come by; for cowherds like young Peter, "the cowboys were not the first to know" (8). Margenau soon learned what the Germans were doing. "It became known even to us that Germany persecuted the Jews. Slowly Jewish and other refugees came through, going fast. One of the main travel routes was close to where Peter Görzen and I had our cows. We took turns to talk to some refugees. For us this was an adventure" (8).

Suspecting that ethnic German Russians might support the invaders, Moscow ordered the expulsion of all men in the Margenau area who were between the ages of 16 and 60. Young Peter was 15 ½ years old and so was spared, but his father was taken. "Being the oldest, father woke me up, gave me some advice, a hug, and asked me to assist mother and siblings as much as possible. … Next morning as I went to the opposite end of the village to collect the cows, I saw unforgettable pictures. These women had just said goodbye to their husbands, sons or brothers, were standing in groups of 2-5 by the road, some still in tears. Most of them knew there was little chance of seeing them again" (9).

The German invasion was massively successful in its early days, and the armies of the Third Reich soon occupied the Ukraine. "Now, let me tell you a more uplifting story," writes Dueck. "During the German occupation those ladies who had been believers before the Soviet regime, on Sundays organized meetings in homes or schools, read the Bible (if one was found) and taught us Christian values. … Since words like salvation, grace or blessings had not been in our vocabulary … we as kids had no idea what they talked about. In one such meeting in spring of '43 the Holy Spirit convinced me that I was a sinner" (11).

The tide of war soon changed, and by 1943 the Soviets were on the counterattack. Dueck's family joined *der grosse Trek*, the Great Trek, travelling westward with the retreating German army. The hunger, cold, illness, lack of shelter, and the death of many constitute a story that could fill a book. Dueck treats even this with his typical wry sense of humour. "The straw we slept on had each night been used by refugees like us and contained all kinds of lice. These lice had been waiting for us all day. … As you can guess, the topic of such evenings was not politics. It was: Who used his team of horses to pull Mrs. X back onto the road? Who was fortunate enough to find a wheel when the old one broke?" (13)

Drafted into the German army

The refugee family eventually arrived in Warthegau, a German-occupied slice of Poland. Here they found employment and relative security – for a short time. The Russians were rapidly advancing through Poland towards Berlin. And there was no end yet in sight to Peter Dueck's afflictions: the Germans decided he would be useful in their armed forces. "In April 1944 men our age received an invitation to show up in a larger city. There must have been about 800 of us" (15).

Here a remarkable incident took place. A German officer questioned the young recruits: "'And who of you would <u>not</u> serve the Third Reich voluntarily?' I think it was a shock for all of us. Out of 500 only 3 men lifted their hand. They were asked to come to the front. Officer: 'And what reason do you have not to serve the

Third Reich voluntarily?' Their answer was: 'We as Mennonites, we believe in nonresistance.' Officer: 'We have no use for such people. We all defend our Reich.' They were led out to the back door and to this day I would still like to know what was their verdict" (16).

Boot camp was a brutal experience. Once again, though, Dueck describes his time there ironically. "The officer, a professor, tried to implant hatred of Jews in us. Most of us would have preferred to sleep during the lecture. But doing 200 or 250 knee bends, holding the rifle in front at arm's length, made us hate him more than the Jews" (17).

Dueck's service in the German army did not last long. His unit was sent to Hungary, where he was wounded by artillery shelling. "One hit so close, I felt my right arm was torn off. It was pitch dark. I tried to move my arm, still on" (18A). Dueck was sent to a field hospital, where he learned that the war was over. "On the village plaza the Americans had rounded up about 30 Germans, marched in front of the soldiers, pulled off their medals, etc., while chewing on something. Since they came from another continent, could they be chewing cod? I had never heard of chewing gum before" (19).

But once again, Dueck's ordeals were not over. "3 days later, May 8, 1945, Germany had surrendered unconditionally. Little did I know, the next 3 ½ years, I would really know the meaning of that word" (19).

In jeopardy of repatriation

Dueck's first prisoner of war camp, located in Bad Aibling, Bavaria, was a foretaste of what was to come. "800 men under open sky. … It became messy after each rain. … The first 6 months, the rumour was the Americans have in mind to weed out half of the German population. American General Patton even came up with another word for population reduction. Later, when it took us 13 days to use the bathroom once, we started to believe such rumours" (19).

"Normally at our age men would have shown pictures of their girl friends. … Instead, Whose mother was the best cook?"

The Allies had agreed to repatriate refugees to their countries of origin. What this really meant was, for example, that Russian ethnic Germans were now being forced back to the Soviet Union, with their destination very likely the Gulag. "Thousands of Russians and Ukrainians had been shipped back by force. It looked like now us Germans would go. … Each time a train was to be filled, by next morning several of them had cut their wrists and bled to death" (21).

In his next prisoner of war camp in Auerbach, Saxony, refugees were, bizarrely, being asked to volunteer for repatriation. Dueck's story of his interview is vivid and darkly comical: "As I came into the room, I was asked if I needed an interpreter. I said no. The Russian asked if I was willing to go back voluntarily, he also stressed that 'Stalin has forgiven all of us.' Also, 'Those who volunteer would not regret it, but those who will be taken by force would suffer for it.' He gave me a minute to think. So I did. After a minute, 'Are you coming?' I said, 'I have no reason not to go. I have not harmed anyone but I stay here, my relatives are here.' He got so mad, banged on the table with his fist and said, 'LIAR. They are waiting for you at home.' … The interpreter gave me a smile. 'You can go'" (21).

The Americans eventually understood the situation, says Dueck: "They had known very little what Stalin was capable of" (22). Dueck's time in his final prisoner of war camp in Regensburg, Bavaria, was his easiest. However, he writes, "In the camps there was a lot of hatred, some Nazi blood, etc., but as a believer I could not hate" (23).

Surviving French internment

The French were also asking for "volunteers." "France needed labourers and they picked ages 18-30. It was said, only for 3 months. Being naïve about the past French and German animosity, I did not even show him my Russian souvenir (a piece of iron still in my right hand)" (23). Thousands of German "volunteers" were crammed into open boxcars and transported into France, where "French guards opened the doors and made sure that each of us got a welcome hit with a rubber belt" (24).

Dueck's three-year volunteer term turned into 31 months of starvation labour. The maltreatment of Germans after World War II is a story that is now beginning to be acknowledged in the West. Prison labourers under French control survived on thin soup and tiny portions of bread. Dueck writes that, on a transport trip to Bordeaux, "we met several hundred POWs who had survived one year in a French camp. Many, many had starved" (25). In their free time, says Dueck, the conversation of prisoners turned to basic needs. "Normally at

our age men would have shown pictures of their girl friends. … Instead, Whose mother was the best cook? What was everybody's favourite food?" (28) And the threat of repatriation had not ceased: Russians showed up with some regularity and forced Russian nationals to return home. Somehow, Dueck was overlooked.

"One Sunday morning," writes Dueck, "it rained, lightly dressed, we were chopping blackberries. The Algerian was in command. To straighten one's back when he was around was very risky. To rest my back for a minute I asked him where to put my pile of brush. He jumped at me so furiously and while I was bent over he hit me a few times on my wet back with a belt. There was no Authority on Earth and no time to lose some tears, but on that Sunday morning I wept inside. Some [prisoners] were hit with his rifle" (26-7).

Conditions slowly improved. Dueck survived and ended up in a refugee camp in Gronau, where he met his future wife and was baptized into the Gronau Refugee Fellowship. (After all his years spent with men, relationships with women were initially frightening.) Looking back on all he endured, Dueck writes, "Someone may ask: Has all of this made you bitter? … It is my sincere wish not to have given the reader of my notes the impression that I was the only one who paid the price because of that war. I was just one of millions" (35). He concludes, "Can I stand before Jesus and not forgive?" (36)

Other sources

"Peter Dueck." *Chilliwack Progress*, Obituaries, 13 Mar 2017. *The Chilliwack Progress*. 2017. www.theprogress.com/obituaries

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"I will not shoot": the Story of David Klassen

Excerpt from: *Waffen der Wehrlosen: Erzatzdienst der Mennoniten in der UdSSR* (Weapons of the Defenceless: Alternative Service of Mennonites in the USSR). Selected and edited by Hans Rempel. Winnipeg: CMBC, 1980.

Introduced and translated by Louise Bergen Price

David Klassen, born in Kronsweide, Khortitza Colony, South Russia, in 1905, reported for his alternative service in May 1928. Term of work was two years, but because the work was often seasonal, the term could extend to three or four years. He was released in 1931, but arrested during the Terror of 1938. In 1943, he and his family left the Soviet Union with the retreating German forces. Soon after their arrival in Germany, he was conscripted into the Waffen SS. Klassen describes both his alternative service and his experience as a war resister in Waffen der Wehrlosen. *The following details his time as a German Army soldier who refused to fight:*

On September 22, 1944, after we had become German citizens, I received an order to report to the Waffen SS in Posen, a city now in Poland [Poznań]. Before I left, I told my wife that I would refuse to take up a weapon. My wife objected – that would be too dangerous – at best it would mean concentration camp, and in the worst case, firing squad. She did not want to experience that. She told me that if I were imprisoned again, I would not survive. (I had been arrested during the period of great "Cleansing" 1938-1939 and had spent two years in prison.) We decided to let events run their course and trust in God, who knew our thoughts regarding participation in war.

So I left for Posen. Other men were already gathered there. I struggled inwardly as to what to do, especially as we were called forward, one after the other. We had to sign papers in which we promised to fight with faithfulness and courage. We signed everything. We could see no way out of the situation. Our hope was that the war would come to an end before we completed our three-month period of training. That was not to be. In the beginning of January 1945, we received a twelve-day furlough in spite of the advance of the Russians and the Western Allies. On January 12, I bade goodbye to my family, knowing I might never see them again. But we held fast to the word of God in Psalm 91:7: "A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you." This word was a great comfort to us, and was fulfilled to me and my family.…

Our military training took place in Iglau (Jihlava), Sudetengau. There we were also to take our oath of enlistment. Again there was a time of intensive soul-

Left to right: David Klassen, Jakob Siemens, Isaak Rempel, Franz Thiessen. All from Kronsweide doing alternative service in the Soviet Union between 1928-1932.
Source: *Waffen der Wehrlosen*, p. 156

searching. We were to take the oath together as a large group, so it would have been possible just to remain silent. But I couldn't do it. We received the order to appear for the oath. Halfway to the officers' headquarters, my feet refused to move, and I leaned against the window as if paralyzed. I turned back, but after taking several steps, I admonished myself, and strode forwards to the door where the officers were. Here I stood. I was unable to go further and leaned against the window. After a while, the door opened, and one of my superiors asked what I wanted. Fear closed my throat; I couldn't speak. I saw death before my eyes. Where was my trust in God? The officer, who felt sorry for me, pulled me into the room where the others were. In answer to their questions, I said that I wasn't able to take the oath, and explained why. Finally, one of them remarked, "Klassen, I've always seen you as one of the most sensible, and now this!"

After a discussion, they brought me to the head officer, who was to settle the matter. He asked me the same questions. After I explained my reasons, I blurted, "I wish I had remained in NKVD (Soviet state security) captivity." Of course that was a stupid answer, given in the excitement of the moment. The officer asked if I'd still be alive in that case.

"No," I replied, "I would not be alive, but I wouldn't have to deal with this ethical dilemma." I also told him about the disgusting way we were treated during our training, and much else. The result of our discussion was that he sent me to the doctor, believing I'd had a nervous breakdown. What happened in the next few days, I will not tell. In any event, I had to remain with the unit.

It was mid-January when about 1,000 of us marched to the railway station. We heard comments from those along the way, such as, "Now they are being herded to the slaughterhouse." We were being sent to France, to the American Front. That was a small encouragement for us, since we had been afraid we'd be sent to the Eastern Front. We hoped to receive more humane treatment from the Americans than from the Russians. At the front, we were divided up in bunkers on the western wall.

In the German army, there was still an order that men with large families would not be sent to the front lines of battle, and so fourteen of us were sent to another bunker. This bunker was built to withstand bombing, and we hoped to await the end of the war here. But again things turned out differently than we'd hoped. One night we were driven right to Waldheim, a village on the front, now in ruins. About one and a half kilometres from the village was a trench with German soldiers – we were to relieve them.

And now, inner struggles began again. I was not worried about danger or death – oftentimes I had offered to be a stretcher bearer, a much more dangerous job, but had always been turned down – but about being forced to carry arms.

During the day, we were not allowed into the open, since we were being shelled by the Americans. So everything happened at night. Many of our men had decided to shoot into the air instead of at the enemy. I didn't feel comfortable with this, although I would have done the same if forced to the front. After much time in prayer, I decided to confront our overseers and explain that I wouldn't shoot at other human beings. I knew I'd likely be condemned to death by execution. When on the following night we were again exhorted not to let a single bullet go to waste because munition was scarce, I gathered courage for my declaration. I told the officer I had

never shot at another person, and never would. The officer looked at me in amazement but said nothing. Other soldiers who heard my declaration thought it meant certain death. They told me that once I'd seen a comrade killed in battle, I'd change my opinion. They also related that a few days earlier a *Volksdeutscher* [ethnic German as distinguished from a German from the Reich] had been shot because he refused to take arms. I said they could shoot me, but I wouldn't shoot others. I knew that the officer had to pass my declaration on to his superiors, or he could lose his own life. I also thought I knew what was in store for me.

Mutterkreuz. Source: Wikipedia

But again events happened in a much different way than I had foreseen. The following day, I was taken to our platoon leader who explained that an officer would be executed for cowardly behaviour at noon, and that all the cowardly soldiers who had been with him would have to witness the execution. This officer and his men, armed with bazookas, and hiding in the woods, had been ordered to fire on American tanks. But when a large number of tanks rolled by, the officer had seen the futility of the operation, and decided to spare the lives of his few men and disobeyed the order. One of his soldiers reported him, and now he was condemned to die.

Now the platoon leader was labelling me as a coward for looking death squarely in the face for my beliefs. I was ordered to appear at the execution and had to answer with a "*jawohl*." He responded by ordering me to bring my gun and two cartridges. I was to participate in the execution.

As I carried my gun and cartridges up the steps, I knew I would not obey the order to shoot. But I was fairly calm and said, "God, you can rescue me, as you rescued the men from the fiery furnace. If not, your will be done. But I will not shoot at the officer."

I knew I was being treated as someone who was mentally ill, but that was also my deliverance.

When I appeared before the platoon leader with my gun and ammunition, he walked with me to the office. At the door he left me and went inside. During this time, I cried inwardly to the Lord, and was heard. As I stood in the corridor, four armed young men appeared and planted themselves at the door. You could tell that they thought it would be an honour to be part of the execution. Several others, who had been among the "cowards," also had to participate. Eventually, the high-ranking officers came out of the office and walked by me, including the platoon leader, who passed by without a word. I was under the impression he didn't want to tell his superiors about my objection to taking a weapon. I walked outside and, still with the intention of not firing, stood beside the four young men. When the sergeant major saw me with a weapon, he asked in amazement, "What are you doing here?" for he thought I should be among the spectators. I directed my gaze to the platoon leader who had ordered me here. He said, "That's my gun. Give it to me, Klassen!"

With great joy I handed him the weapon and cartridges. At that moment it was also announced that the execution would be delayed, since they had to wait for the leader of our battalion. We were all commanded to return in an hour. I went to my room and stayed there alone. But I wasn't all alone, for I had the conviction that the Lord was with me. I had decided that I'd stay in my room unless I was called, so I sat and waited, keeping track of the time on my watch. I wondered how the officer must be feeling whose death was approaching, minute by minute. When the hour had passed, I heard shots.

I didn't leave my room until time for roll call when the platoon leader handed me my gun with the comment, "I suppose this is the first deed your gun has accomplished?"

I said, "I don't know, sir. Were you not there when your comrade was shot?" For if he had been, he would have noticed my absence.

He replied that the officer was no comrade, but a coward. Had I not been there? he asked. When I told him I wasn't, he asked why.

"No one called me," I answered. He looked at me,

puzzled, and sent me away. I knew I was being treated as someone who was mentally ill, but that was also my deliverance.

The following day, after roll call, he asked me, "Klassen, how many children do you have?"

"Eight."

"Then you've probably received the *Mutterkreuz*?" [an award given to mothers who fulfilled certain criteria, among them the number of children they were raising] I answered that neither my wife nor I had received the reward. (She was in line to receive it, but circumstances prevented it.)

A while later, I was sent back to the Reich with several other men, some older, some with disabilities. After I returned my gear, I felt happy and thankful, although I had been classified as someone who was mentally ill, and would further be considered the same.

We were sent to the *Junkerschule* in Bad Telz in Austria [likely the *Junkerschule Bad Tölz* in Germany, an SS training academy near the Austrian border]. Here we had to take care of the horses. When those in the *Junkerschule* were also sent to the front, we were sent with horses to Innsbruck. Here we remained until the end of the war. On the way home to our families, we were captured by the Americans and placed in prisoner-of-war camps. At our training, we'd had our blood group tattooed under the arm – we didn't realize at the time how this would be viewed by the Allies. Others groups in the Wehrmacht had also been tattooed, even if they had nothing to do with the SS. But because of the tattoo, we had to spend an extra thirteen months in prison.

After our release from the American prisoner-of-war camp, I found my son Hans in Germany. My wife and other children had been sent to Siberia. I emigrated to Canada with my son, although that involved its own difficulties due to the blood group tattoo under my arm. My wife was able to join me after many years. Our son David came to Germany in 1974. The other children remain in Russia. But all are alive. We trust in the Lord to lead us further according to the verse already quoted, and which has been fulfilled in the past and in the present: "He has sent his angels to watch over you and keep you in all your ways." (Ps 91:11)

A Brief History of Alexanderwohl

By Brian Stucky

The origin of the Alexanderwohl Church takes us to Flanders, which in the sixteenth century was a province in the Netherlands. These Flemish people fled the northern provinces of the Netherlands because of severe persecution and settled with many others around Amsterdam.

Mennonites migrated to West Prussia, to Przechowka (now Przechówko), as early as 1540. From 1600 to 1650 and even before, many of these people settled in the Danzig area between the Vistula and Nogat rivers. They built beautiful farms, planted orchards, and established roads and water canals.

The church at Przechowka was organized with some individuals from Netherlands, some ethnic Germans, some ethnic Polish, some with Flemish roots, some from Moravia, one a Swedish Lutheran soldier, and from other groups. It is not known when this church began, although 1640 is the date of the first lease of Przechowka by Mennonites. In 1784, the elder Jacob Wedel recorded the Przechowka Church Record. This listed not only current members, but members remembered and recorded ancestors and dates back as far as possible. This is one of the oldest Mennonite church records in existence, and was carried to Kansas.

When strong militaristic trends began to develop and Mennonites refused to do military service, they were regarded with hostility. Strict military and property laws were now enacted. They were not to proclaim their faith to anyone outside their ranks. Mennonites now began to look for a new home because of all the pressures and persecution which they faced.

On July 22, 1763, Catherine II, Empress of Russia, issued a manifesto guaranteeing several freedoms to immigrants, including exemption from military service. She invited the Mennonites in West Prussia to immigrate to Russia, promising them freedom "for all time" and 165 acres of land. In 1821, the group migrated to the Molotschna colony of Ukraine in southern Russia. While camped out south of Warsaw, an impressive carriage stopped. Out stepped Czar Alexander I of Russia. He asked who the group was, and where they were going. When leaders explained they were Mennonites coming into his country, he remarked, "Oh,

send greetings to your brethren; I have been there." And then, he wished them well. These Mennonites took his name, Alexander, together with the word he spoke, "well" or "*wohl*" in German, and created the name Alexanderwohl. Hence the name of their new church and village in Russia. This story has been documented by Russian governmental records.

Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church, Goessel, Kansas, 2007. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexanderwohl_Mennonite_Church

However, in 1871, their lot changed again. Alexander II rose to the throne, and cancelled all the privileges of the Mennonites, including military service exemption. Many groups organized, sent a delegation to America to scout for land and, in 1874 and the decade following, migrated to America. In that year, 18,000 came to the prairie states, and 10,000 to 12,000 to Kansas alone. Alexanderwohl split into two groups. One, under the leadership of Dietrich Gaeddert, went to McPherson and Reno counties to form the Hoffnungsau Mennonite Church. The group led by Elder Jacob Buller came to Marion County near today's Goessel to form the Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church.

Through the years, Alexanderwohl has tried to be faithful to God with an Anabaptist perspective, through wars, times of testing, and good times. It has been a founding member of what is today the Western District Conference, Bethel College, and the General Conference, today a part of Mennonite Church USA. The church has strong programs in education, youth, music, and has strong lay leadership. Located on a state highway, it is a frequent tour stop. And, as one of the oldest Mennonite congregations in the world, it attracts national and international connections. Those who tell its story are clear that you cannot tell the history of the church without telling its faith story, and vice versa.

Brian D. Stucky is a retired art and photography teacher and coach living in Goessel, Kansas. He graduated from Bethel College and taught 4 years at Buhler (KS) High School and 34 years at Goessel in grades K-12. In addition, he coached various sports. In 2003, he published Hallowed Hardwood: Vintage Basketball Gyms of Kansas*. He continues to write for various newspapers and magazines. Brian has studied Mennonite history, Kansas history, and genealogy. He is currently studying pioneer trails of central Kansas. In 2012, he was invited to speak at the national convention of the Oregon-California Trails Association. He is a member of numerous trail and historical groups, and is the President of the Friends of the Cherokee Trail—Kansas. He is a frequent speaker as well as a frequent tour guide for the historic Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church and the Goessel area. A specialty is Alexanderwohl church's architecture. Currently, he serves as Chair of the Board of Deacons at Alexanderwohl.*

The Lost Tombstones of Chortitza

By Louise Bergen Price, based on a report by Werner Toews

Where have all the graveyards gone?
– Pete Seeger

Koop-Paetkau gravestone. All photos courtesy of Werner Toews

Mennonites lived in the Chortitza Rosental area of Ukraine for roughly 150 years, a mere blip in Ukraine's long history. By the end of World War II, most were gone, either transported to the east by the Soviets before the German advance in 1941, or west with retreating German forces in late 1943. The few who remained had married into the local population. Few had any desire to divulge their ancestry, linked as it was to Ukraine's wartime enemy. Many of the cemeteries, including those in Chortitza and Rosental, had been destroyed as part of Stalin's anti-religious drive, their stones "repurposed" in other construction projects. Over time, memories of "German" neighbours faded. All that remained were buildings with distinctive brickwork that told of a different time.

Still, as buildings decayed and older people passed on, some Ukrainians became fascinated by this almost-forgotten history. One of these was Max Shtatsky, a student at the Zaporizhzhian National University who was particularly interested in learning about the history of a culture through studying its gravestones. After graduating with a degree in history, Shtatsky was hired by the Khortytsia National Reserve (KNR) on Khortytsia Island.

When Shtatsky learned that a barn not far from the former Chortitza cemetery had collapsed, he asked for, and received, permission to begin an archeological dig. The property in question had been taken over by a collective farm but had once belonged to a Paetkau family who were dispossessed in 1931. According to local lore, the barn, built in 1936, had Mennonite gravestones embedded in its foundation.

July 22, the first day of excavation, was hot and humid, and the work backbreaking, since the site had been in use as an informal construction material dump. At first the team found only gravestone fragments without inscriptions. "There were no walls in the barn place," Shtatsky told journalist Zvonareva Olga of UA News. "We went with my colleague with one crowbar for two and a shovel…. Then they found a stone with the inscription, jumped like crazy" (Zvonareva). The first inscription referenced a woman whose maiden name was Siemens, 1820-1887. More stones with inscriptions soon followed.

Meanwhile, in Canada, Werner Toews, who read about the project through the Facebook site *Mennonite Genealogy and History*, contacted Shtatsky and offered his help. As the dig progressed, Shtatsky emailed photos of the stones to Toews who researched family names through GRANDMA (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry) and relayed this information back to Shtatsky.

Toews' research was quickly rewarded: on the second day of the dig, an elegant black marble stone with gold inlay was unearthed that commemorated Toews' great-great-grandmother, Katherina Pätkau Koop (1839-1910).

As work continued, and the scope of the project became known, heavy machinery was brought in to assist in the work. Most of the stones had been cut and mortared into the foundation; few were intact. Excavation

continued to September 7, when Shtatsky reported that all stones had been removed from the foundation. In total, about 300 fragments were found and about 100 names identified. There are rumours of a basement in the building that could contain more stones, so further work is anticipated, albeit on a smaller scale.

The stones have now been transported to the historical museum on Khortytsia Island where they are being cleaned and fitted together. Plans are underway to build a memorial that will incorporate the stones. Shtatsky, meanwhile, is searching for gravestones embedded in other buildings.

Why, one might ask, is this discovery significant? For Werner Toews, there are two main reasons. The discovery is important in a historical context because, up to this point at least, there seems to be no list of persons buried in the cemetery. A record of names would be an important source for descendants. On a personal note, the discovery has "brought family history to life in a way that I never would have imagined. Finding these stones is an important part of our collective history in Ukraine."

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Gravestone site with Max Shtatsky.

The Genealogy Corner: The Ties that Bind
Joining and Leaving the Mennonite Community: A Genealogical Perspective
Part 1: The Chortitza Colony 1788-1848

By Glenn H. Penner (gpenner@uoguelph.ca)

The image we have of the traditional and historic Mennonite community is one of isolation and intramarriage. In Russia this was as much the result of Russian government policy as Mennonite church and community policy. Catherine the Great's invitation of 1763 clearly states that no colonist could proselytize among other Christian subjects. After about 1800, foreign settlers in South Russia were required to ask the permission of the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers in order to change religions and move to another colony (different religious groups were rarely allowed to settle in the same colony). Several non-Mennonites joined the Mennonites in the emigration from Prussia and more moved from nearby German colonies during the early decades. Below is an accounting for fifteen of these early additions to the Mennonite community in Chortitza. Note that, due to space limitations, I can not include every bit of information available on each person. The GRANDMA database (see number next to each name) has more information on most of those mentioned below. [1] It should be mentioned that many other non-Mennonites lived in the Chortitza colony during this time period. However, I have not seen evidence that these families joined the Mennonite church and intermarried with the Chortitza Mennonites.

Eva Glockmann (1804-1888; GM#186877). Her origins have not been established. She married Johann, the son of the Johann Loeppky mentioned below, in 1824.

Kaspar Adrian Hausknecht (1790-1848; GM#223615). He was a teacher in the Chortitza colony in the 1830s. Although many of his descendants left the Mennonite community, the surname is still around.

Heinrich Heese (1787-1868; GM#199356). He left Prussia in 1808 in order to avoid military conscription and became a Mennonite after arriving in Russia. The Heese last name is still found in the Mennonite community.

Peter Hildebrand (1754-1849; GM#174696). He was a Lutheran who joined the Jacob Hoeppner family on the trek to Russia in 1788. He later married Hoeppner's daughter. His descendants were prominent in the Kronsweide Frisian congregation in the Chortitza colony.

Carl Jaeger (1783-1839; GM#198860). He was a gardener who ran the nursery in Rosenthal. In 1805 he married Elisabeth Hiebert. In 1808 his sister Helena married Jacob Krahn. The Jaeger surname died with his son Carl.

David Karolius (b. ca. 1788; GM#528257). According to the 1801 census of the Chortitza colony, he and his sister Sara were foster children of the Mennonite Jacob Goetz. He married Helena Thiessen and his only known child, Jacob, is unaccounted for after the 1816 census.

Joseph Kirsch (b. ca. 1778; GM#660972). A passport document from 1813 indicates that he had converted from being a Lutheran to being a Mennonite. [2] At the time he was living in Kronsgarten and in 1816 he was living in Einlage. His son Heinrich may have been the Heinrich Kirsch (GM#509228) who married Helena Braun.

Michael Kropp (b. ca. 1762; GM#199260). His origins have not been established. He was already in Chortitza in 1793 and had married the widow of Johann Loeppky by 1795. After she died, he married Helena Wieler, with whom he had five children. His sons cannot be accounted for after 1816 and this surname did not continue among the Mennonites of Russia.

Johann Loeppky (unknown dates; GM#199254). He appears to have become a Mennonite before immigrating to Russia in 1788-89. His place of origin in Prussia, as well as his original religion, are unknown. This surname is rare but well known in Canada.

Johann Morgenstern (unknown dates; no GM number). All we know about this man is that he was a Mennonite at the time of his immigration to Russia and that he settled in Einlage in 1819 [3]. He is probably related to Justina Morgenstern (GM#61460), who married Johann Ens.

Joseph Nowitzky (1776-1844; GM#187166). He was likely of Jewish origin. He and his wife, Helena Boschmann, had several children. His only known son, Heinrich, is unaccounted for after the 1816 census. Three daughters are known to have married Mennonites.

Solomon Schmidt (1818-1886; GM#182476). He was a Lutheran who married the Mennonite Maria Fehr in 1848. Although he was married by the Mennonite ministry, he was not allowed to become a Mennonite by the Russian government. He was baptized and joined the Mennonite church in 1877, the year after arriving in Canada.

Johann Schoen (b. 1751 or 1756; GM#220253). According to an 1811 list of outsiders living in the Chortitza colony, he was a 60-year-old *Tischler* [carpenter, joiner, cabinetmaker] who came to Russia with the Lutherans who established the Josephthal colony. [4] It is not known what became of his son Johann, but his daughter married Heinrich Hiebert and had twelve children.

Carl/Christoph Striemer (1783-1871; GM#186905). He is first mentioned in a Russian-language document of 1812, which gives his age as 28 and implies that he came to Chortitza in 1811. [5] By 1816 he was married to Maria Wiens. They later moved to the Bergthal colony. Their children and grandchildren emigrated to Canada in the 1870s.

Johann Winter (died before 1819; GM#173634). It is not known if or when he became a Mennonite. What we do know is that his widow, Maria (Pauls), and his surviving sons Carl and Johann immigrated to the Chortitza colony in 1819. Winter is a rare but well-known Mennonite name in Canada. Johann Winter may have been related to a Catharina Winter who died at the home of her brother Franz Penner in Hohenwald, Prussia, on December 20, 1816, at the age of 55. [6]

1. More information on the GRANDMA database can be found at https://www.grandmaonline.org/gmolstore/pc/Overview-d1.htm
2. Odessa State Archives, Fonds 6, Inventory 1, file 607.
3. Peter Rempel. *Mennonite Migration to Russia: 1788-1828*. Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society: 2007.
4. Odessa State Archives, Fonds 6, Inventory 1, file 587.
5. Odessa State Archives, Fonds 6, Inventory 1, file 602.
6. Lutheran church records of Thiensdorf, West Prussia.

MHSBC Fundraiser: Menno Comedy Nite
October 5, 2019, Abbotsford Arts Centre

Reported by Robert Martens

"How much of stand-up is improvised?" asked a voice from the crowd at Menno Comedy Nite. Very little, was the reply from Matt Falk, perhaps about five percent. The trick, he said, is to make it *seem* improvised.

Stand-up comedian Matt Falk has that skill in spades, sending the audience into gales of laughter as he danced like a Mennonite cat onstage. The occasion was the annual MHSBC fundraiser, though the format was unusual – normally a lecturer would have been at the centre of the event.

Danny Unrau, emcee for the event, opened the evening. "What is a Mennonite?" he asked, as he donned a Jewish kippa, an Arab keffiyeh, and a Catholic priest's collar. "Am I still a Mennonite?" he asked.

It's a puzzling question, of course, and Matt Falk's answers took the form of jokes – perhaps as good a response as any. His one-liners were great, but he may have shone brightest in his sketches. Falk's best moment was perhaps the story that concluded his performance: an altercation between two women in an MCC thrift store. You had to be there.

Some jokes and remarks from the evening:

* "Tickets were $35 – some of you left your spouses at home."
* "Crumbs from the toaster, you use that for breading chicken, that's the Mennonite way."
* "I'm too tame for the secular world and too edgy for the church world. I'm a Mennonite."
* "The secret to being married is to not stop being married – it's that simple."
* "We like listening to other people's failures."
* On being asked to portray a gritty New York character in a movie: "This is the face of someone who goes to Michael's with his wife, and likes it."
* "They say don't forget where you came from. When you're from a Mennonite community, it's impossible to forget."
* On turning down a Hollywood gig and returning home to his family: "I actually like my wife. In LA that's probably unusual."
* "It has everything to do with the people who are there when you put your pants on in the morning."

At one point in the evening, Matt Falk commented that the crowd was an odd one, laughing at jokes that sometimes fall flat, and sitting stone-faced during quips that ordinarily send an audience into hysterics. The evening, then, may have been "in reverse," but Matt Falk made it work.

Book Launch: Victor Wiens, *Refugees and Ambassadors: Mennonite Missions in Brazil*. September 21, 2019, Mennonite Heritage Museum

Reported by Robert Martens

His new publication, said Victor Wiens at his book launch, is a "rewrite" of his PhD thesis, and theses, he pointed out, can be rather dry. In *Refugees and Ambassadors*, the story of Mennonites and missions in Brazil, he has tried to make the writing more accessible. The book is also intended as a kind of textbook, he said, for mission workers and pastors. Victor Wiens spent 25 years working in Brazil; he currently works for MB Mission in Ab-

Victor Wiens with his book "Refugees and Ambassadors."
Photo: Julia M. Toews

botsford.

Mennonite settlements in Brazil began inauspiciously. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) was looking for a country willing to accept traumatized Mennonite refugees from the nascent Soviet Union. MCC recommended Paraguay, which was welcoming the refugees with open arms and ensuring freedom from military conscription. About 1,200 Mennonites refused the Paraguayan offer and settled in the plush but isolated rainforests of Brazil. They arrived in two waves: first, via Germany, which was struggling to recover from the First World War; and second, fleeing the USSR across the Amur River into China and from there to Brazil.

The new Brazilians quickly established churches and schools but beginnings were excruciatingly difficult: simply surviving was an achievement. Their original colonies were a failure in economic terms, but they persisted. Then, in the 1940s a revival took place among them. It was not merely a matter of individual conversions, said Wiens, but also an "awakening to a call to mission."

Soon the enduring Mennonite social conscience showed its face. An orphanage was founded in Curitiba, and a girls' home in Sāo Paolo. MCC, which had felt rebuffed when Mennonite refugees had chosen Brazil over Paraguay, "took the high road," said Wiens, and cooperated in social projects after 1947.

Over the next decades, the Brazilian Mennonite church grew exponentially. Paraphrasing Zechariah 4:10, Victor Wiens commented, "We cannot despise the day of small beginnings." New churches and social enterprises were born from the efforts of villagers, small-scale project builders, individuals – even children – and, Wiens emphasized, the dedicated labour of single and married women.

Most Brazilian Mennonites, said Wiens, have culturally assimilated and are largely urbanized. Less than fifteen percent are now "Germanic" in origin. Mennonite churches in Brazil are now overwhelmingly "Latino," and some are sending missionaries abroad: "they have come full circle," said Wiens.

The talk was followed by a lively Q&A session. In response to a question on the principle of nonparticipation in the military, Wiens said that the subject had been deemphasized in Brazil over the years. A resurgence of interest in peacemaking is now taking place, not particularly in relation to the military but as a reaction to endemic social violence.

***Stories of the Anabaptists*: Gallery Exhibition Opening Reception, September 11, 2019**

An exhibition of original watercolour paintings by Gareth Brandt in the temporary gallery at the Mennonite Heritage Museum.

Reported by Julia Born Toews

The thirteen watercolours on display depicted sixteenth-century sites significant to the beginnings of the Radical Reformation.

Gareth Brandt, the artist, has been professor of spiritual formation at Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford, BC, since 2000. Part of his mandate is to teach Anabaptist History and Thought. These paintings are based on his personal visits to various sites relevant to Anabaptist history.

Since the central act of the Anabaptist movement was believer's water baptism, he decided to paint the scenes with water. He describes the paintings as "simple folk art style that is symbolic of the Anabaptist/Mennonite value of simplicity and non-adornment. The frames, backing, and mattes were all purchased from MCC Thrift stores and/or made by hand from left-over or found materials." Gareth chose the sites that he portrayed on the basis of a strong emotional reaction to each place; he also tried to select sites important to all three strands of Anabaptism. Hence his inclusion of a painting of the prison where Jakob Hutter was incarcerated.

At the gallery opening, Gareth noted that he enjoys being creative and has dabbled in various artistic endeavours from poetry to painting to sculpture to spoken word. Having put aside such activities for a while, a traumatic event in his life created a need for therapeutic activities. He went back to watercolour painting during this time. He found that painting "slowed him down."

Gareth's many artistic sides were evident in his presentation at the reception. He read two sonnets he had written for Menno Simons: "Menno's Confession" and "My Confession to Menno." Gareth is aware of how radical Anabaptist ideas were during the sixteenth century. In keeping with this theme, his two sons, accompanying themselves on guitar and ukulele, sang two songs during the reception: "Man in Black," a protest song written and recorded by Johnny Cash in 1971; and Bob Dylan's song from 1962, "Blowin' in the Wind."

Gareth also pointed out that the Anabaptist movement started out as a youth movement. None of the early leaders lived beyond 28 years of age. Menno Simons en-

Gareth Brandt at the Mennonite Heritage Museum Gallery opening. Photo: Julia M. Toews

tered the movement around ten years later and never did meet these rebels.

Each of the paintings is accompanied by a description of the importance of the depicted site in the history of Anabaptism. These insightful comments "lift the lid off history" and offer a glimpse of the human face behind Anabaptist history.

Gareth started off the evening with four comments :
1. that the crowd had gathered on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish First Nation.
2. that this was officially Mennonite Heritage Week.
3. that the day was 9/11 – exactly eighteen years since the New York tragedy.
4. that the writ was dropped for the Canadian federal election that day.

Book Launch: Dora Dueck, *All That Belongs*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2019. October 19, 2019, Mennonite Heritage Museum.

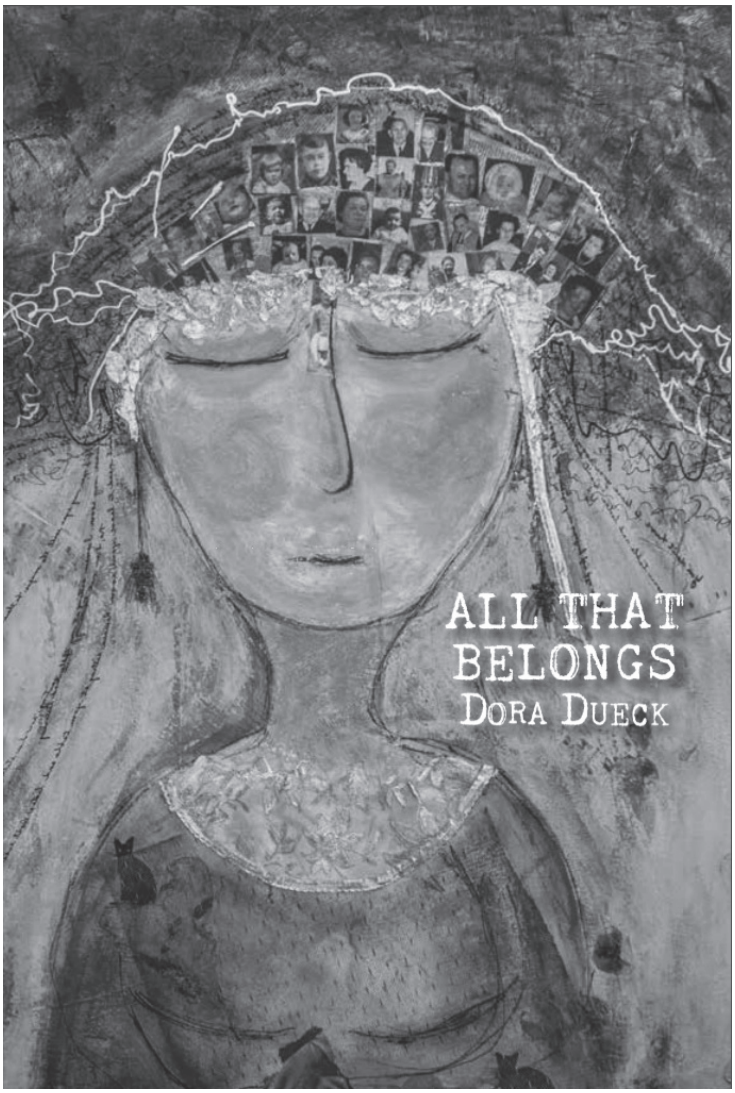
Reported by Robert Martens

Her latest novel, *All That Belongs*, said author Dora Dueck at her Abbotsford book launch, is dedicated to her seven siblings. "What a huge role siblings have in shaping us," she remarked.

The theme of familial ties is crucial to the book. Its primary character, Catherine, is an archivist who is digging into her family history. In her vocation, Catherine has studied the pasts of others but "has resisted dealing with her own." It is Catherine's "year of remembrance in which she's preoccupied with the dead," said Dueck, and "there are always little shocks" when memories are laid bare. Besides, as a line in the novel points out, "family trees are rarely reassuring." The second prominent theme in *All That Belongs*, Dueck said, is shame, which we may bear for internal reasons, but is often "imposed from without by cultures and systems."

Dueck read a few sections from her novel to a most attentive crowd. Her prose is dignified, exact, probing, meditative. The subject matter is often dark, but Dueck's sense of humour remains intact: "None of the lovely archivists I know were harmed in the writing of this book."

Some responses during the Q&A session that followed the reading:
* "The whole process of writing is discovering who the characters are and what the story wants to be."
* On how the novel develops: "As they say, God gives you the first sign and you have to do the rest."
* On the Mennonite backdrop: "Catherine's story comes from the history we lived through." That history "almost becomes a kind of burden," since Dueck is not targeting solely a Mennonite readership.



* On whether family members are reflected in the plot: not her intention, but "if the shoe fits, wear it."
* "When we grow up we take on shame for many reasons."
* "I'm a slow writer."
* On jokes playing a part in the narrative: "There is an undercurrent of sadness [in the book] so it's good to have that voice."

Book Launch: Anne Konrad, *Down Clearbrook Road: A Girl in a BC Mennonite Village, 1946- 1951*. Mennonite Heritage Museum, November 30, 2019.

Reported by Robert Martens

Red Quarter Moon, written a few years ago by Anne Konrad, dealt with the very dark matter of the totalitarian Soviet state. Konrad needed, psychologically, to change direction at that point. "I had to turn to some happy period," she said at her book launch for *Down Clearbrook Road*. And so she wrote a mostly lighthearted memoir of her youthful years in the Fraser Valley. "It was a wonderful time to grow up," she remarked, "I am not one of those Mennonites who finds fault."

Konrad's writing style in this book, as evidenced by her readings at the launch, is light and breezy, leaving room, however, for the melancholy or acerbic. She frequently drew laughs from her audience. Her memoir also recalls the great flood of 1948, and the arrival of traumatized refugees from the USSR that same year. She spent her younger years during a time of great change. "I was growing up, this area was growing up," she remarked.

A book review follows.

Konrad, Anne. *Down Clearbrook Road: A Girl in a BC Mennonite Village, 1946-1951.* Victoria, BC: FriesenPress, 2019. 388 pp.

Reviewed by David Giesbrecht

Anne Konrad's latest book will be of interest to at least two groups of readers: those who, like her, grew up in Clearbrook during those heady post-war years when her immigrant Mennonite community was sprouting both roots and wings; and to any outsiders who are curious to "experience" the never-ending drama in this face-to-face, tight-knit community, where secrets were scarce and gossip the currency of daily discourse.

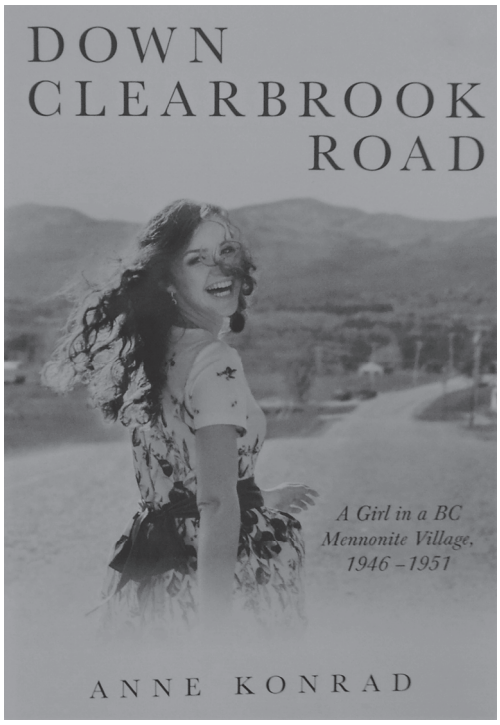
The author was born in La Glace, Alberta. In 1946 she and her family resettled in Clearbrook, allowing, in this volume, for ubiquitous comparisons and contrasts between two places of Mennonite beginnings in Canada.

Anne Konrad with her book "Down Clearbrook Road."
Photo: Julia M. Toews

Down Clearbrook Road is an inviting read, both for the details the author chooses to include, and being discreet, those she notably avoids. Impressed on Anne's memory (aided by a detailed diary) is a stream-of-consciousness-like kaleidoscope of people and events populating her storytelling. For in Clearbrook, "we lived on the road," where one could smell what neighbours were cooking, take note of what was suspended on laundry lines, and fully participate in communal chatter (37). Included are recipes for Mennonite *faspa* foods like *Zwieback* (105), a perennial favourite for those Sunday afternoon clan gatherings.

Much of Anne's memoir has to do with narrating how these agriculture-bent immigrants made their living. The annual routine of farm labour began with picking the

abundant strawberries fields then surrounding Clearbrook, followed in quick succession by ripening raspberries, and then, with hardly a pause, on to the sprawling hop fields, which left an incriminating black stain on pickers' hands. Curiously, it was in the hop fields where harvesting reached a crescendo. Here a "preacher's wife could pick … without conscience pangs" and in between those lush rows, the atmosphere tingled with "boy/girl chemistry" (312).



In essence, this story concentrates on two major preoccupations. Consistent with their strong Russian heritage, Clearbrook Mennonites spared few efforts in providing a quality education for their young people. With lingering admiration, Anne recognizes the Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI) teaching staff at the time. Singled out is F. C. Thiessen, for his distinguished contributions to both the school and the community. How shocking was the unanticipated news that their beloved Mr. Thiessen died of a heart attack on the morning of 24 February 1950, on his way to school.

Further, the mid-century ethos of the MEI is richly described, including student uniforms then in vogue, banal notes students exchanged to mitigate the boredom of classes, and nicknames (monikers), such as Schniggits and Whiskey (164), cleverly assigned both to identify individuals with common surnames and, no less effectively, as a means of social levelling for swollen egos. Memorable for the author are the many events that filled the MEI auditorium, including those (initially controversial) literary evenings, songfests and the hugely popular student dramatic productions, such as *Glaube und Heimat*, performed on May 4 and 5, 1951, in which the author was a member of the cast (338).

The perceptive author leaves the impression of having laboured assiduously to convey the complex and pervasive religious culture in which she grew up, with attendant anomalies such as "creeping modernity" not excluded. "When BC Mennonites weren't working full out … they were at church" (121). Clear was the expectation that missing Sunday services was not one of the options for young people. Frequently, evenings were set aside to hear missionary reports. And whenever the much admired C. F. Klassen was in Clearbrook, he filled the MEI auditorium with his first-hand reporting of how MCC was assisting desperate European Mennonite refugees in the wake of World War II.

In her version of Clearbrook culture at the time, Anne is not reticent to comment on some uneven passages. Without evident uncertainty, she comments on the numerous evangelists who bestrode the Fraser Valley. One (whom she does not name), exuding confidence, asked his hearers, "Have you got your BA?" (139) which parsed, for those not attuned to the attempt at humour, meant "Are you born again?" Or the inequality when "a woman caught in adultery" was disciplined in the local church, but not her male consort. Thoughtfully, she reflects on a "woman's place" in the scheme of living at the time. Nor does she shy away from examining the plight of local Japanese farmers who, in 1942, were stripped of their land and possessions, precisely at the time when land-hungry Mennonites were flooding the area.

Down Clearbrook Road provides a wide-ranging, memory-laden historical excursion, emblematically expressed in a closing reflection: "For me and other young adults the door … to a bigger village had been opened" (382). Unfortunately, the poor quality of the many black and white photographs are not equal to the telling of this good story.

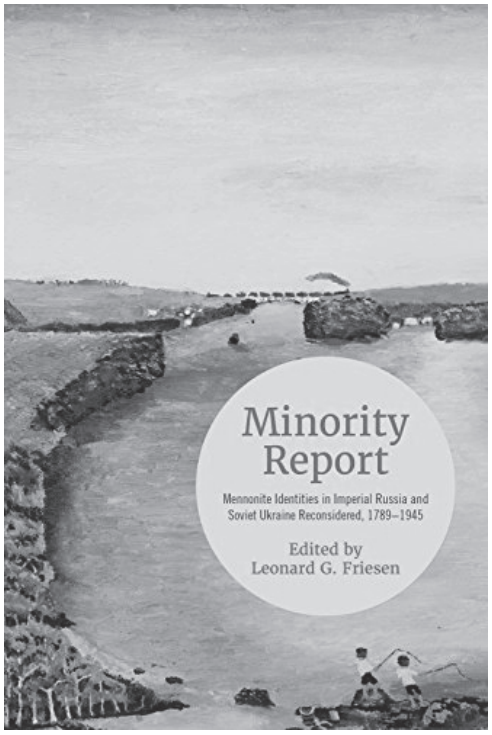
Leonard G. Friesen, editor. *Minority Report: Mennonite Identities in Imperial Russia and Soviet Ukraine Reconsidered, 1789-1945*. University of Toronto Press: Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2018. 338 pp.

Reviewed by Robert Martens

We need to understand more how and why Mennonite colonists once identified so closely with the empire, the landscape, and the peoples of southern Ukraine. For the history to be told is not simply for the benefit of German Mennonites but also for all who care for the history of our common homeland. All of us need to know and love it, and to remember that nothing passes without a trace.

And may there be peace on earth. (Ukrainian scholar Svetlana Bobyleva 56)

In his introduction to this book of essays, Leonard Friesen argues that the study of Russian Mennonite history has often been overshadowed by commonplaces derived from in-group sources, that is, from Mennonites themselves. These commonplaces are only partially true. For example, writes Friesen, the catastrophe of the Bolshevik Revolution has been perceived as inevitable, the result of widespread abuse of the poor in which Mennonites participated. On the contrary, he writes, the Russian empire in 1913 was probably doing quite well and was poised for economic takeoff. Another commonplace, the wholesale victimization of Mennonites by the totalitarian Soviet state, also conceals a darker truth – that a number of Mennonites themselves participated in the atrocities of that regime.



This book of essays edited by Wilfrid Laurier University historian Leonard Friesen seeks to tweak historical understandings of Mennonite identity and self-identity in Imperial Russia and the USSR. The volume includes nine studies authored by both North Americans and Ukrainians. In the appendix, Friesen explains how this came about: via a series of events both strange and coincidental. The Department of World History at Dnipropetrovsk State University (DSU), a place of thriving scholarship and study in the 1990s, was focused on Germany and its story. The breakup of the Soviet Union, however, was precipitating a national Ukrainian debate on the identity of Ukraine itself, and scholars began looking at ethnic groups that had helped shaped the country. The focus changed inward, away from studies on Germany to German ethnicities that had once dwelt in Ukraine and, rather oddly, it shifted significantly to the Mennonite story.

And then Harvey Dyck appeared on the scene. Dyck, who taught at the University of Toronto, was in Ukraine researching new historical material on Mennonites that had resulted from the opening up of state archives. He encountered Ukrainian scholar Nataliya Venger who was studying Mennonite history, read a paper she had written on the topic, and realized he had landed in the middle of something unexpected: Mennonite studies at DSU.

The dynamic Professor Dyck then went into action, organizing a museum exhibit on Ukrainian Mennonites, arranging for the raising of two monuments to the Mennonite heritage in Ukraine, and coordinating a Mennonite studies conference that took place in the industrial city of Zaporizhzhia in 1999. Dyck was aided in his efforts by individuals involved in the Mennonite Heritage Cruises that began in 1994; these included Walter and Marina Unger, Olga Shmakina, and the late Paul Toews.

Each of the essays in *Minority Report* contains provocative or even controversial observations on the Ukrainian Mennonite story.

* In her study of the founding of the Mennonite colony of Borozenko, historian Svetlana Bobyleva (DSU) describes the profound distinctiveness of Mennonite farmers, who worked their own land alongside their hired workers but refused to rent property to the locals. This was utterly contrary to the arrangement that had existed between Russian aristocrats and their peasants, resulting in resentment against the "German interlopers." Mennonites were farming more like Europeans than Russians.

* American scholar John Staples revises the common perceptions of the great Mennonite organizer Johann Cornies. It has often been argued that Cornies was deeply resented for his "secularist" reforms. Not so, argues Staples; in fact, these reforms were generally regarded as legitimate. Mennonites were beginning to perceive themselves as a people who were an important component of the Russian state. Cornies himself, writes Staples, was not secularist but influenced by Pietism.

* Irina Cherkazianova, who received her doctorate in St. Petersburg where she now lives, traces the trajectory of Mennonite education in the Russian empire. Until the 1830s, Mennonite schools were nearly entirely independent; from then until the 1880s, the Russian language was introduced into the curriculum as the empire modernized. Mennonites generally compromised with the state's efforts at assimilation. After the unification of Germany in 1871, however, anti-German sentiment in-

creased to the point that many Mennonites welcomed the overthrow of the aristocracy in 1917.

* DSU graduate Oksana Beznosova argues that Mennonites in Russia were conflicted from the start, engaged in a dance between religious and secular authority. The individuals who founded the Mennonite Brethren church in 1860, she says, were often landless but also frequently educated and upwardly mobile. By the 1890s Mennonites had transitioned from an isolated community to a church within a multi-ethnic empire.

* Nataliya Venger, historian at DSU, spotlights the Russian suspicion and envy of Mennonite entrepreneurs who made good. Mennonite businessmen learned how to lobby and influence politicians, but anti-German opinion mounted in the late nineteenth century – there were even rumours of anti-German pogroms, although that never came about. During World War I, Mennonite entrepreneurs manufactured war materials in order to avoid the confiscation of their factories; the church never objected.

Ukrainian child standing in the monument commissioned by Harvey Dyck, near the Maedchenschule in Chortitza. Photo: Louise Bergen Price

* John B. Toews writes an engaging profile of Abraham A. Friesen, a principal delegate in the Russian Mennonites' Study Commission that travelled North America in the 1920s to investigate possibilities for emigration. A.A. Friesen advocated the adoption of the Russian language: "We can no longer be the quiet in the land," he wrote. When he arrived in the United States, he was disheartened by American Mennonite disunity, and remarked that he might prefer living among mainstream Americans. Friesen's urbanity may have been characteristic of many Russian Mennonites.

* Alberta scholar Colin Neufeldt writes that by 1928-9, hundreds of Mennonites sat on local soviets. Their reasons for this were varied: employment in a troubled time; security for their families; the increasing difficulty of emigration; fear; and outright ambition. Working for the state often ended in disaster, as members of soviets were themselves purged in the Stalinist terror.

* Alexander Beznosov, now teaching in Moscow, writes of the Soviets' staggering incompetence that was the partial cause of the great famine in 1930s Ukraine. The new Nazi regime in Germany offered aid to "Germans" living in the USSR; the German aid fund was multi-faith and included Jews in its governing structure. German Russians were ultimately doomed and hopelessly tainted by this effort. The Soviets soon denied that there was a famine at all. Mennonites received some help from relatives abroad, but that may have contributed to Soviet suspicion: the arrest rate of Mennonites was ten times the national average.

* In his essay on the Second World War, DSU scholar Viktor K. Klets contends that neither the Soviets nor Germans regarded Mennonites as a separate people. Some Mennonites collaborated with the Germans when their army invaded in 1941 but mostly the attitude was passive acceptance. Remarkably, a few Mennonites opposed the German occupation. The Germans, says Klets, were over-confident, convinced that German ethnic groups in Ukraine would automatically support them. Mennonites had long ceased to feel German: when they fled to Germany in 1943, they were perceived by German nationals as aliens.

Leonard Friesen writes: I am the child of immigrants, and so have always lived my life conscious of being caught between vastly different lands. Thus, though born in Canada, Canada is but a small part of my identity. It is also no surprise that I have been fascinated by the past from an early age. It was always a land of mystery for me, one that I always knew held the answers to questions I wanted to engage: who was I, what was my community, and how did my world come to be? On a more mundane level I received a PhD from the University of Toronto in 1989 after extensive graduate studies in a country that no longer exists (the Soviet Union, and Leningrad/St. Petersburg above all). I have been at Laurier since 1994 and I have seen the History Department at this university develop into a remarkably strong unit in that time. www.wlu.ca

Roots and Branches

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Saying Goodbye to Rudy Baerg (1931-2019)

By Robert Martens

With Rudy Baerg's death, the Mennonite Heritage Museum has lost a treasured volunteer, and the wider community, a man of talent and faith. Rudy was born November 29, 1931 near Crowfoot, Alberta, and grew up during the years of the Great Depression. He graduated from Coaldale Bible School and then earned a Bachelor of Religious Education degree at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg. It was at MBBC that he met Hildegarde Hein; they were married in 1958.

Rudy then taught history and music at Winkler Bible School. His love for music grew to the point where he resolved to make music education the focus of his career. After earning a B.A. in history in Waterloo, Ontario, Rudy was asked to teach music and history at the Mennonite Educational Institute in Abbotsford. In 1968 he was invited to join the music faculty at what is now Columbia Bible College. He accepted, and taught there for the next 29 years.

I played violin under his direction many times. Rudy was demanding, meticulous, and invariably gracious. The 1997 CBC yearbook was dedicated to Rudy Baerg, and included a tribute penned by Professor Tony Funk. "For nearly thirty years, Rudy has freely given of himself, sharing his love for singing. The Bible tells us that worship is a costly venture, and I believe that Rudy has lived that selflessly: thousands of hours preparing his first love, the Chorale; enriching the lives of countless students singing major oratorio works; coaching small groups; voice lessons…. On behalf of all your students, past and present, thanks for your faithfulness, your conviction and your love for God."

Rudy was an avid volunteer, serving with his wife at the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine and at Ten Thousand Villages in the Maritimes and Toronto. He volunteered as a Gallery Attendant at the Mennonite Heritage Museum from January 2019 onwards. Hildegarde is a valued volunteer at the Mennonite Historical Society of BC.

Paintings by Gareth Brandt

Left: “Third Baptism,” painting of the Limmat River in Zurich, scene of the drowning of Felix Manz.

Bottom: “Menno’s First Church,” painting of church in Pingjum, Friesland

Right: “Chains”

“This set of chains is in a tower of Thun Castle in Switzerland where Anabaptists were imprisoned.”
- Gareth Brandt