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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

100 YEARS | MCC
Relief, development and peace in the name of Christ

MCC Logo with suitcases used by Russian Mennonite refugees from the New Beginnings display at the Mennonite Heritage Museum.
Photo collage: Julia M. Toews

Table of Contents

Editorial

By Maryann Tjart Jantzen

It's been a hundred years since the Mennonite Central Committee was formed in Elkhart, Indiana, on July 27, 1920, to assist those suffering in Russia amidst the chaos of the Russian Revolution. Over these years, MCC has created an amazing legacy of local and global assistance provided "in the name of Christ" to those in need, often involving the participation of thousands of volunteers.

In honour of MCC's work over the last hundred years, this issue provides snapshots of various MCC global engagements, from the pre-MCC 1920 disappearance of volunteer Clayton Kratz in war-torn Molotschna, to the joy a MCC volunteer brought to a displaced Mennonite family newly settled in Canada after the trauma of World War II, and to more recent MCC development work in Vietnam, Columbia and Kenya. Of course, a significant ongoing aspect of MCC's work in Canada has been partnership with the Canadian government in refugee sponsorship, assisting displaced people to find safety and security in a new homeland. These examples of the work of MCC are a reminder of the importance of putting faith into action.

In another timely article, Vern Giesbrecht examines the history of Canadian political and cultural responses to Mennonite, Hutterite and Doukhobor immigrants, reminding us that hostile reactions to minority immigrant groups in Canada are nothing new, but a pattern that has emerged periodically, especially during times of political and/or cultural crisis. Many Mennonites from Ukraine came to Canada as refugee immigrants during the chaotic 1920s and late 1940s. But as Mennonites have assimilated more widely into Canadian culture, it's been easy for them to forget that their forbearers were once also an object of prejudice and distrust. For example, Giesbrecht quotes an editorial from the *Winnipeg Free Press* applauding the 1919 halt to further Mennonite (as well as Hutterite and Doukhobor) immigration to Canada: "We do not want in Canada anybody who is not prepared to become a citizen in the full sense of the word…. People of peculiar religion, living in colonies and clinging to an alien tongue and to racial habits are from every point of view undesirable…."

Ironically, last year saw the Canadian Parliament approve a motion, brought forth by local Member of Parliament Ed Fast, to establish the second week in September as Mennonite Heritage Week. At the time Fast declared, "This is an opportunity for the Government of Canada to recognize the contributions Mennonites have made in building our great country. The Mennonite community is incredibly diverse and has invested heavily in building a community that is tolerant and prosperous, where we care for one another and are generous with each other." (Not all Canadian Mennonites welcomed this development, some seeing it as creating further confusion about Mennonite cultural/theological identity.)

In recent years, many Mennonite groups have continued to welcome refugees through participation in MCC's sponsorship program. But at the same time, some of the cultural pressures around us generate hostility and distrust toward those whom Jesus might call "the least among us." Let's always remember the time when our forebearers were a minority group with seemingly alien habits seeking a place of belonging in their new homeland of Canada.

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Greetings from Richard Thiessen, on Behalf of the Board of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

In the middle of March, the decision was made to close the Mennonite Heritage Museum and the Society Archives due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Soon afterwards, the provincial government mandated that we be closed. Restrictions on public gatherings impacted the public events that the Society had planned for the spring, including the *Pier 21* musical scheduled for April 24 and our writer's workshop for May 2 featuring Dora Dueck. While these closures and cancellations have been disappointing, I know that they pale in comparison to the drastic changes that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on all of us, particularly those of us who are elderly and deemed to be at greater risk if contracting the coronavirus.

It is probably safe to say that very few of us have lived through a pandemic. Some of you were alive during the

Spanish Influenza pandemic that began in 1918 and remained active in Canada for several years after, killing 50,000 people. Probably more of us can recall stories that our parents and grandparents told us of the typhus epidemic that ravaged Russia during the Russian Civil War, killing three million people, including many Mennonites. I can't imagine the fear and chaos that these epidemics caused one hundred years ago. Historians tell us that the Spanish Influenza wiped out entire villages in Canada.

I find it fascinating to hear the varied responses that people are having to COVID-19, and more specifically, to the restrictions that our government has placed on us to physically distance from others. Some voices in our society have been protesting the closure of businesses and the restrictions on public gatherings, claiming this is all just a plot by the globalist elite to take away our freedoms, or a plot to undermine certain political leaders. It is ironic that the success that we have experienced here in Canada in terms of not overloading our medical system and keeping the number of outbreaks in residential facilities relatively low is now being used as "proof" that this whole situation is overblown and an example of government over-reach.

We are going to continue to hear those voices in our society. Some people refuse to believe that this is a serious health crisis. However, those of us who consider ourselves to be students of history know of the devastation that the Spanish Influenza and the typhus epidemic caused after World War I. Lessons were learned from the events of a century ago by scientists and the medical community, and our governments have taken steps to make sure that we do not repeat history. Those steps have felt harsh at times, but most of us recognize that we have needed to take them.

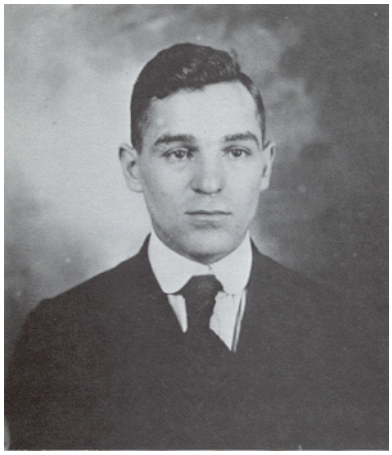
It appears that our governments will be lifting restrictions slowly and cautiously. At this point in time we do not know how the loosening up of these restrictions will impact hours of operation for the Museum and the Historical Society. Our inclination is to encourage our visitors and volunteers, many of whom are seniors, to continue to be cautious and remain close to home.

The staff at both the Museum and the Historical Society are continuing to work. They are able to maintain physical distancing from one another and custodial staff are devoting significant hours throughout the week to do the cleaning and disinfecting that is required. So, if you would like to contact staff from either organization, you can still do that by email or by phone. We miss our visitors and volunteers, and would love to hear from you by email or by phone.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Roots and Branches*, and ask that you continue to support MHSBC with your financial gifts.

Whosoever Loseth His Life … The Disappearance of Clayton Kratz

By Robert Martens



Clayton Katz. Source: GAMEO

The birth in martyrdom of the Anabaptist-Mennonite church is well known. Thousands perished in the first years of its existence. *Martyrs Mirror*, a thick volume of accounts and graphic images, became a staple in many Mennonite homes, especially in the Swiss Mennonite stream. But it was only one hundred years ago that a bright and talented farm boy from Blooming Glen, Pennsylvania, died while working for Mennonite Central Committee. Clayton Kratz perished for what he called a life of "service."

A happy and protected childhood

Clayton Hunsberger Kratz grew up in an Old Mennonite community that clung to tradition. His very name is in fact indicative of that; the mother's maiden name customarily became the child's middle name. Born in 1896, Clayton grew up in a stone farmhouse near the village of Blooming Glen, Pennsylvania. The house was plain but beautified by Fraktur,* homemade rugs, horsehair furniture, and embroidered pillows. Clayton was one of six children, though one died of diphtheria at a young age. He had a happy upbringing, loving his life on the farm, in particular, it seemed, developing an affection for horses, and this in spite of the fact that a horse's kick broke his leg. He would later harbour fond memories of his childhood.

Clayton never lost his love for his Mennonite background, but church services might have seemed burdensome at times. The long Sunday mornings began with a

Vorrede (introductory sermon), moved on to the *Rede* (main sermon), and ended with a *Zeugnis* (testimony meeting). Women wore net prayer caps; mirrors were frowned upon as a symptom of vanity; and males and females sat on separate sides of the meeting hall. During Clayton's childhood, German-language services were transitioning to English, and of course this was controversial. Outside the church building, Mennonites spoke Pennsylvania Dutch or English.

Clayton Kratz attended a one-room school heated by a coal-fired potbellied stove. When his father no longer felt able to maintain the farm, the family moved to a house in Blooming Glen, and there he attended Hilltop High School. He was soon at the top of his class, though naturally he would not, as a modest Mennonite, brag about it. His principal, however, encouraged him to go on to university.

Love of learning, love of the land

After being baptized on April 26, 1914, at Blooming Glen Church, Clayton studied at a Normal School near Philadelphia, where he befriended a Roman Catholic – Clayton was spreading his wings. Subsequently, he taught at schools in which he was not much older than his students. He was still considering his principal's advice, though, to attend university, and soon set his eye on Goshen College in Indiana. He chose Goshen not only for its Mennonite origins but also because it provided courses in agriculture. And so he enrolled at Goshen in 1917.

Clayton still dreamt of farming, however, and his heart lay in the land. In a letter to his sister, he wrote, "I tell you farming appeals to me more and more as I study about it, and find out how the different plants grow and how to improve their growth. And sometimes I think that I can hardly wait until I am through school and settled down in a farm in good old Pennsylvania, however much I do like farm life" (qtd in Gross Harder 97).

World War I intervened. Clayton was disappointed when his brother Jacob enlisted, but apparently no serious conflict between the two erupted. Then, fearing that he might be conscripted, in 1918 Clayton returned to Pennsylvania to work as a farmhand – the American government was less likely to draft agricultural workers, considered vital to the war cause. That same year the armistice was called. Clayton returned to Goshen College.

Life at Goshen satisfied him. He loved botany, enjoyed tennis and baseball, and joined the debating team. He was elected president of the local YMCA and travelled to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, to attend a YMCA conference. He worked to earn school money at a Studebaker plant in South Bend, Indiana. And he was dating Edith Miller from Pinto, Maryland. He called her Edie; she called him Sammy for some reason – the couple were obviously in love.

Clayton Kratz, born Nov. 5, 1896. Went to Russia 1920. Memorial marker in the Blooming Glen Mennonite Church cemetery. Source of photos on this page: findagrave.com

Clayton could not help feeling a call to something bigger. In a diary, he noted, "Christianity impels people to move from the bottom upwards. Every human life has the power to be changed. We must believe more in each other. This will lead to more belief in God. We must believe that there will be a new world" (qtd in Gross Harder 121). A life of "service" was a relatively new concept for Mennonites. Clayton Kratz was in the forefront of the new wave.

Can we depend on you?

Far-away events were about to turn his life upside-down. The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the ensuing civil war in Russia descended upon Russian Mennonites like the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Famine stalked the land. In 1919 American Swiss Mennonites took action, sending three men to Russia to investigate how best to help their cousins. Russian Mennonites were active as well, delegating four men in 1920 to plead for assistance from North Americans. Response from American Mennonites was swift. The Mennonite Central Committee was formed in Elkhart, Indiana, on July 27, 1920, and very quickly 25 tons of bedding and clothing were collected – besides cash donations – to be sent to the victims of the troubles in Russia.

The MCC leadership decided that a delegation should travel to Russia to assess the situation and organize the distribution of relief. Two men quickly volunteered: Orie O. Miller of Akron, Pennsylvania, and Arthur Slagel of Flanagan, Illinois. It was felt, however, that a delegation of two was insufficient. Feelers for a third man were sent out, but all responses were negative until scholar and activist Harold Bender suggested contacting Clayton Kratz. A series of telegrams tells the story:

RECEIVED LETTER FROM O MILLER THIS PM I MADE DEFINITE PLANS TO BE IN SCHOOL. THIS FALL IF YOU NEED MY HELP SERIOUSLY I WOULD BE WILLING TO GIVE MY SERVICE CH KRATZ

NEED ANOTHER MAN SERIOUSLY IN GROUP SAILING SEPT 1ST CAN YOU GET READY AT SCOTTDALE THUR OR FRI THIS WEEK CAN WE DEPEND ON YOU WIRE TODAY LEVI MUMAW

WILL REPORT AT SCOTTDALE ON FRI KRATZ
(qtd in Gross Harder 131)

Kratz had about two weeks to say goodbye to his fiancé and family, pack, and leave for Russia. In his application for relief work, he wrote, "I feel it is my duty and privilege to help the suffering because this great world catastrophe has not caused me any inconvenience" (qtd in Gross Miller 136).

A providential voyage

Miller, Slagel and Kratz set sail for Constantinople (now Istanbul) on the aptly named *Providence*; Constantinople was chosen as the destination because Mennonites had been involved in relief work in the area since the 1890s, assisting victims of the Turkish-Armenian conflict. On board the trio set themselves a busy schedule but found time for devotions and learning Russian. They were lucky to have eight free days for sightseeing after the ship landed in Italy, and toured Rome (where they were part of a group audience with Pope Benedict XV), Pompeii, Corinth and Athens.

The ship finally docked at Constantinople on September 27. They dialogued with Red Cross workers who informed them of the situation in South Russia, and the American Embassy quickly granted them permission to travel into Ukraine.

A descent into nightmare

Arthur Slagel stayed in Constantinople to wait for supplies, while Miller and Kratz boarded a ship that would take them to Sevastopol. Miller had with him $4,000 in cash and a letter of introduction from the American Embassy. On October 6 they reached their destination, and found a city swarming with refugees. General Pyotr Wrangel, leader of the Whites – the non-Communist faction warring with the Soviet Reds – had established his headquarters in Sevastopol. His representatives promised support for Miller and Kratz.

On October 8, the two men, accompanied by an interpreter, boarded a train headed inland for Melitopol. Their third-class compartment provided a little relief from the crowded conditions. Refugees were travelling back to their homes which had been taken back from the Reds by Wrangel's troops, and they were on the train in such numbers that many were forced to cling to the sides and roofs of the wagons.

In the following days, Kratz and Miller reconnoitred the countryside, visiting Ohrloff and Halbstadt to scout out conditions, and staying in Mennonite homes. Halbstadt was at the time the centre of Mennonite efforts to emigrate – flee from – Russia. The area was a chaos of shifting battle lines as Reds, Whites, and Makhno's black-flag anarchists fought it out. Kratz wrote in a letter to his mother, "I had started this letter yesterday but about every five minutes I am interrupted by someone who wants information. The people want to get out of Russia and they come from villages fifteen to twenty miles away to see what we know about their chances of getting out…. I am well and glad that I am here. If any clothing is collected in our church will you get my two overcoats from my trunk and send them also…" (qtd in Gross Harder 169).

...they were on the train in such numbers that many were forced to cling to the sides and roofs of the wagons.

Kratz and Miller decided to travel on to Chortitza, where Mennonites were suffering even more than those in Halbstadt, and to Aleksandrovsk (now Zaporizhzhia), where they would explore the needs of native Russian victims. To get there they enlisted the help of Johann Peters, a former breeder of race horses, who was down to his last two animals. Peters' generosity was immeasurable: he hitched up his remaining horses, and travelled with Kratz and Miller to Aleksandrovsk. The region was a scene of desolation. Along with human victims, about 12,000 horses had died in the confusion, and their bodies littered the countryside. An eerie photo shows Clayton

Kratz standing sadly beside the corpse of a horse.

The three men reached Aleksandrovsk but were told there that Chortitza was now out of bounds; the Whites were in retreat and the area was being evacuated. And then came that fateful, odd decision: Miller and Peters left on a hospital train – Miller needed to return to the coast to help organize supplies – but Clayton Kratz stayed behind to coordinate relief efforts. Clayton felt he was "called" to remain, surely, but was it a case of youthful naiveté? Did he feel, as youth often do, that danger was irrelevant? In fact, the decision must have seemed rational to all concerned. Even if the battle front was drawing nearer, the work needed doing.

Clayton Kratz and Dave Miller at Goshen College ca. 1919. Photo: GAMEO

The disappearance

Clayton Kratz was back in Halbstadt, staying at the home of Johann Peters, who had become something of a father figure to him. The Whites were in full retreat. Peters vigorously urged Kratz to leave the area, but Kratz, perhaps thinking that as an American neutral he would likely be safe, refused to go. Finally, on October 28, Clayton agreed that he would flee the following day. That night, the Reds occupied Halbstadt.

Before sunrise, Kratz and Peters were arrested. They were harshly treated, but an officer released them on the condition that hostages would volunteer to take their place if necessary. They considered themselves fortunate to still be alive. On November 5, at the Peters home, Clayton Kratz celebrated his twenty-fourth birthday.

It would be his last. A few days later, Peters and Kratz were rearrested and beaten. Peters was permitted to return home but Clayton Kratz was taken away by the arresting party. Johann Peters pursued; he was forced to turn back. The news was not good: it was learned that Kratz was a prisoner of the 22nd Division which was known for its ruthlessness. Another Mennonite named Peters, a teacher by profession, agreed to search for Kratz in the area between Ohrloff and Landskrone, and, if possible, to bring the young American back. The teacher Peters gave up the search when he was threatened that he would be shot if he did not return home.

The teacher made one last effort. He appeared before the local head of the Cheka, the Soviet secret police. Once again, Peters was threatened: "What do you have in common with this American?" (qtd in Gross Harder 205)

In the ensuing weeks, Kratz was sighted several times, but eventually he disappeared into the Soviet night. Was he shot? exiled? Or did he die of disease in the brutal conditions of a prison camp?

The legacy

Back in North America, the various Mennonite denominational groups met to officially establish the Mennonite Central Committee. The first MCC meeting was held September 27, 1920, in Chicago. The following year, A. J. Miller, director of MCC relief efforts in Russia, launched an investigation into the disappearance of Clayton Kratz. The investigation was stonewalled by Soviet officials. Miller, however, speculated that Kratz's arrest may have been instigated by a local Russian official who had previously worked in a Halbstadt printing press. Harold Bender writes that those who arrested Kratz were "of a hoodlum type" and "it is quite possible that the arrest was a purely local blood-lust matter" (2).

"In the beginning," writes Jack Dueck, "MCC was considered a temporary project. But soon other needs arose and called for new wineskins. Evangelical faith prodded *die Stillen im Lande* (the quiet in the land) to become a public voice for people in need" (3). Mennonite Central Committee has grown from small beginnings into a global relief organization. Did Clayton Kratz's death provide a spark for its development?

Whatever the case, let us leave the last word to Clayton Kratz. In his diary this idealistic young man wrote, "Prayer is the power to see and to know and must be found through experience. A man who knows what prayer is prays. Pray while you act" (Gross Harder 120).

* "Frakturs were birth, baptismal, and wedding certificates that were hand-lettered and painted…." (Gross Harder 30)

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The Face of MCC

By Louise Bergen Price

The comforter is over seventy years old, the cloth soft as butter. Wool batting pokes through tears in the strawberry design. In a pinch it could still keep you warm.

I don't know where it was made, or whose fingers pushed the needle in and out, stitching layers, tying knots. I imagine a group of women gathered around the quilting frame, laughing, sharing recipes and homemaking tips, talking about children and grandchildren. Wondering, perhaps, who would sleep under this comforter.

Women's groups like this one were responding to an urgent cry for help from MCC. Together, they would sew or collect 250 tons of clothing in 1946 to send to post-war Europe's refugee camps (mcccanada.ca).

"Aunty Mary" on left, with her sister Susan. Photo source: Louise Bergen Price

Miss Mary B. Geigley of Metzler's Church in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, also heard MCC's call. She and her sister Susan got up early each morning to bake bread that they sold in a small bakery. In her free time, Miss Mary sewed layettes. Tiny nighties and undershirts of soft flannel, diapers. Included in each package, as on each quilt, a label with the MCC logo: In the Name of Christ.

MCC Quilt received by Louise Bergen Price's family when they were refugees. Photo source: Louise Bergen Price

Halfway across the world, my parents were refugees with a newborn (me) in Lager Treffling, Austria. My mother was overwhelmed with gratitude for the comforter and the layette – especially for the seven diapers! In between feeding and caring for her baby, Mom crocheted doilies and table runners to express her thanks. I imagine Miss Mary must have been thrilled to receive Mom's package. She was 42 and single, had no children of her own. We became part of her extended family, and she was our "Aunty Mary."

In the first difficult years in Canada, when my parents had little money for Christmas or birthday gifts, there was always something from Aunty Mary – a dress, a book, or a toy. Once I learned English, I was the official letter writer/translator. Her letters were chatty, talking about what she and her sister had been baking for their customers, and how her extended family was doing. Each letter began with *Greetings of Love in the Master's Name*.

We never met Aunty Mary. She died from cancer in 1966. In her busy life, she opened her heart to a refugee family from a place and culture she could only imagine.

Viet Nam: A Journey of Hope

By Claire Ewert Fisher

Viet Nam 1973-75

In June of 1973, Wally Ewert and I set out on our great adventure. Energized by the anti-establishment attitudes and new freedoms of the 1960s and 1970s, we were convinced that we could make the world a better place. We left careers and future hopes for a small Asian country. We knew that Viet Nam was in the middle of a war. Our Mennonite church upbringing had taught us a world view where non-violent peacemaking was the better alternative. We had walked in protest marches on the university campus. Our non-violent peacemaking perspective was reinforced as we witnessed media reports of the brutality of war.

The Viet Nam War, as it was called on this side of the Pacific, had become unpopular in the USA. U.S. combat troops had been sent into Viet Nam for ten years with no appreciable change in the situation. U.S. advisors and funds supported military efforts in Viet Nam much longer.

But finally, in 1973, the Paris Peace Accords were signed and U.S. enlisted soldiers were sent home. Advisors stayed on. It was a war where the under-resourced but popular independence movement, known as the National Liberation Front (NLF), was victorious.

- The North Viet Nam forces were to retain the territory they had captured.
- U.S. prisoners of war were to be released.
- Both sides were to find a political solution to the conflict.

The fighting, however, raged on.

With four years of university education, we set out. We encountered the stark realities of war. Our understandings of what was essential for life and our faith in God were the only preparation we had to face the truths of the next two years. The scars of war left a mark on us too.

On our first visit to the MCC Unit in Nha Trang, we watched tracer bullets flash through the night skies. We heard strange popping sounds and saw streaks of light criss-crossing a nearby hillside. This was the first of many nights punctuated by artillery explosions.

Our MCC house in Pleiku (in the Central Highlands, where MCC's work was primarily focused on medical care and agricultural development), sat next to the hospital we ran jointly with the Tin Lanh church. Across the street was a South Vietnamese heavy artillery base. As the rockets were fired in the direction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the west, the loud percussive sound literally caused the dust to sift down from the ceiling.

Chi Sau, who worked as cook and cleaner in our house, was raising her three school-aged children alone. Her husband had been killed in the fighting.

When the tall grass was set on fire around the base, it resembled Canada Day with landmines exploding like fireworks in quick succession.

Frequently we saw B-52 bomber jet trails high in the sky as they passed over into Cambodia and Laos, just 40 kilometres away. There they dropped their payload on the Ho Chi Minh Trail where North Vietnamese troops travelled to and from their combat missions. Then we felt the earth tremble just before we heard explosive sounds reaching us from a distance.

We had heard about the herbicide called Agent Orange – but the propaganda in North America told us it would just strip leaves off trees. It apparently had no long-term impacts either on trees or humans. Reportedly, some military men even drank the poison in an attempt to demonstrate its non-serious consequences.

MCC in Viet Nam

MCC was called to be present in this war. MCC's role in Viet Nam evolved as circumstances changed. In 1954, MCC came to Viet Nam to assist displaced people in the South who were relocated there as a result of the Geneva Accords. In areas around Saigon, MCCers distributed approximately $50,000 of MCC resources and $75,000 of U.S. government relief supplies (42.5 tons) consisting of food, clothing and soap. In 1955 a doctor arrived and helped MCC focus on health concerns. Later a bread-making project provided French loaves to orphans and needy children in the Saigon area.

As U.S. military, political and economic involvement increased, MCC workers distanced themselves from the American government. The need to self-identify as peace builders became clear. The men on the MCC team did this visibly by sporting full-grown beards, unlike the U.S. personnel. MCCers also sought ways to relieve the suffering of Vietnamese on both sides of the conflict and increased their contact with officials from the North in order to send shipments of relief supplies. MCC attempt-

ed to help those who suffered regardless of their political leanings.

In 1966, MCC joined with Church World Service and Lutheran World Relief to form Viet Nam Christian Service (VNCS). Combined efforts built capacity to assist the Vietnamese. Programming, including medical assistance for persons with visual problems at the hospital in Nha Trang, providing physiotherapists for the many who had lost limbs in Quang Ngai province, and making available a general hospital to serve the needs of the minorities in the Central Highlands at Pleiku. In the Highlands, agriculture and community development work supported the work at the hospital. In response to the growing number of refugees, material resources were distributed and educational programming developed.

Claire Ewert Fisher with son Matthew and first husband Wally Ewert, who died in 1990.
Photo courtesy of Claire Ewert Fisher

By 1973, the three agencies decided to each pursue their own goals and VNCS was disbanded. MCC continued to administer health and social service projects in southern and central Viet Nam. Some volunteers began studying the issue of unexploded ordnances which led to an ordnance removal project.

Settling in

Wally and I settled into the MCC unit house in Pleiku; Co Huong and Jean Hershey, both nurses in the hospital, were our house mates. Jean's Vietnamese daughter, Vui, was a delight in our household. Wally worked in agricultural development. I ordered drugs and supplies for the hospital and served as host in the unit house. I also volunteered at the leprosarium and collected tribal legends and folklore. We became aware of many orphaned children, often with mixed racial backgrounds.

Wally and I mused out loud about orphaned children in our Bible study group made up of missionary friends. One Saturday evening in 1974, as Wally and I walked across our compound for supper, we took a decision to start our family. Little did we know that as we were making this decision, the first of our children was being born in a village a short distance from Pleiku.

A young mother was about to deliver her third child. The labour was difficult. Shortly after the baby's birth, the mother died. It was customary in that community for the baby to be buried with its mother. There was no accepted way for the child to be nursed by another mother, nor was there any way to purchase baby formula.

The next day, the Banker family, Wycliffe Bible translators, were in the village. They heard about the father with three young children and the premature death of the mother. They asked the father if he would be willing to give up the child for other parents to raise. The father, apparently loving his children deeply, agreed to give this child up to live a life that he himself would never know.

When the Bankers' vehicle drove onto the compound later that afternoon, Wally went to the door in answer to their knock. In a moment he was back in the room, his question bursting out: "Claire, do we want a baby?" It took no thought. Of course we wanted a baby.

The baby was a boy. His tiny frame smelled of wood fire. As Wally and Jean went downtown to find some baby formula, I held him and knew that his name was Matthew. Matthew means "a gift from God." The first night, we put him in a drawer with a lamp underneath.

Our unspoken prayer had been answered.

Within a week, friends travelled back to Matthew's village, located the grieving father, and had him fill out a birth certificate. There was no hint of second-guessing his earlier decision. Before the month was out, I had travelled to Saigon to begin adoption procedures through Holt Adoption Agency. It seemed almost effortless to have the agency folks come to Pleiku for a home visit and approve us for adoption. Now began the long, and, as it turned out, complicated procedure of achieving full adoption.

The American War 1968-1975

The war efforts were grinding down. As early as January 1968, the Tet Offensive marked a decisive turning point in the American War, as it was known in Viet Nam. As folks were celebrating the Lunar New Year, the Viet Cong, or Northern troops, launched a series of strikes in more than 100 cities and towns, including Saigon. The South Vietnamese and Americans counterattacked with massive firepower, bombing and shelling heavily populated cities. The retaliation was devastating.

The Viet Cong may have lost the battle, but this was the critical turning point on the road to winning the war. The U.S. military had long been boasting that victory was just a matter of time. Watching the killing and chaos via media reports, many U.S. citizens stopped believing the hype. Stories of massacres began to leak out – like the one at My Lai. Antiwar demonstrations rocked U.S. university campuses and spilled onto the streets.

North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh reportedly said, "Everything depends on the Americans. If they want to make war for twenty years, then we shall make war for twenty years. If they want to make peace, we shall make peace and invite them to tea afterwards. We have a secret weapon – it is called nationalism."

It only took another seven years. After the Paris Peace Accords were signed, people tired of the conflict. Funeral processions were much too frequent.

The adoption

It was March 1975. MCC called an all-team meeting in Saigon. But before we left Pleiku, having heard some rumours, we left our photo albums and slides with missionary friends. Just in case.

After the meetings and before we were able to get back up to Pleiku, an Air America plane had been shot down at the Pleiku airport and the airport was shut down.

And so we settled in Saigon for a time. Daily we heard of one province after another being turned over to the other side – of South Vietnamese soldiers throwing down their weapons and their uniforms and running for their lives. The government in control was changing hands so quickly that it created vacuums of power. MCC set about finding other assignments for MCCers. We were reassigned to work in Bangladesh. There was only one hitch – we still had no legal documentation for our son.

The day was Monday, March 31, 1975. The atmosphere in Saigon was not only hot and humid, it was tense with political intrigue and fear! The media was filled with images of Vietnamese in civilian clothes hanging onto helicopter skids as they lifted into the air. Regular civilians were pushing their way into any plane or onto anything that would float. Fear of the unknown future under Communist rule caused great anxiety amongst the population. All many could imagine was escape.

An official from the Canadian Consulate came to our door to say that the Canadian government could no longer assure our safety. We needed to leave by commercial means as soon as possible. There was only one problem – our son still had no legal status and therefore was not free to leave the country. Our journey was taking us – we didn't know where. Before I retired to bed that evening, I searched for some help. I took my Bible and was led to Hebrews chapter 11. The first verse reads, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." I decided that was exactly what I needed. I needed faith to see me through. So I begged God for faith.

The next morning before I woke, I dreamed that we were evacuated – airlifted out of Viet Nam. On waking, I remembered my dream but didn't know what it meant. But it did give us the confidence to continue visiting various officials to see if we could get some help with our conundrum. By Friday afternoon we had arrived at the office of a civil servant whose rank was high enough that he could sign an exit paper for our son. After a few minutes of conversation, it became clear that he was in no mood to sign "yet another American" exit permit. He shoved the papers aside and said, "All these Americans wanting to leave…."

As we drove away, we asked our translator if it was time to offer a bribe. He said no. But he did take us to the Canadian Consulate where we would beg for help. But they could not offer us diplomatic help either. This was not the time to ask the president to sign an adoption paper. But there was an evacuation flight coming in from

Trenton, Ontario. It was already in Hong Kong. If we wanted to be on that flight, we were to be available by phone at a certain time tomorrow.

So with lighter spirits, confident that God was indeed at work in our lives, we met with the rest of the MCC team. Earl, Max, Jim and Yoshihiro had decided to stay on in Viet Nam to witness the change in government. Pat and the children were going on to Bangkok. Doris, Mike and baby Esther were also planning to be on the evacuation flight going to Canada. Jean and Vui, and Ann Noel (after getting herself engaged to the Brit who worked for Oxfam), would also go on to Bangkok where they would await the next decisions. Everyone seemed to have a plan for the next step.

Claire Ewert Fisher. Photo source: mcsask.ca

We said our goodbyes and waited. Sure enough the phone rang at the appointed time and we were off to the Canadian compound. There we waited – Canadians and "dependants of Canadians" – Vietnamese spouses, house and office staff, friends. Soon enough we were on our way to the Tan Son Nhat airport to await our flight to – freedom?

Canadian ambassadors and high-ranking government officials from Singapore, Hong Kong, Viet Nam and Bangkok were meeting with Vietnamese officials to secure permission for "dependants of Canadians" to leave.

The crew members of the C-130 Hercules were getting anxious. It was already 4 pm. By 5:38 the sun would be down. That would make the lumbering propeller-driven cargo plane an easy target for rocket fire from the ground. There had been gunfire visible as they came into Saigon earlier – that made this a combat mission.

When the officials emerged from their meeting, all eyes were fixed on them. No, they had not secured permission for dependants of Canadians to leave on this flight. There were, however, 63 orphans who had been on a flight earlier in the week. That plane had crashed on takeoff from this airport. They had permission to leave for Canada.

So there we stood in the middle of the waiting area. Holding our son, not knowing what the next step could be. Two men approached us – one a Canadian diplomat, the other a crew member. One of them said, give him to me, I'll get him onboard. The other took off an Aunt Jemima doll from the zipper on his jump suit and gave it to our son – who clutched it. We walked through the regular check-out line. Through the corner of my eye, I saw our son being carried through another line – some papers were slapped on the desk. They kept on walking in spite of Vietnamese officials calling for them to stop. They disappeared from sight. Now there would be 64 orphans on that flight.

By the time we got to the plane, we could hear the desperate cry of a child. When we saw our son strapped into a seat on the plane, it became music to our ears.

The flight to Hong Kong seemed to take forever. Babies and small children were afraid and some were ill around us. By the time we arrived at Hong Kong, we were already front-page news. We intended to stay in Hong Kong for a short holiday. But on Sunday afternoon, an official from the Embassy came to our hotel room and told us we ought to go directly to Canada: a Chinese leader had just died, and because Holt Adoption Agency was U.S.-based, we would end up in the U.S. without permission to leave the country. So we joined the evacuation flight all the way to Canada..

We arrived in Saskatoon, Sunday, April 6, late afternoon. When we called our cousins to come get us, we asked that they bring along some coats for us. There had been a late spring snowfall and the ground was covered in white. This began our next great adventure.

Claire Ewert Fisher is the interim pastor of Rosthern Mennonite Church, Treaty 6 Territory, Homeland of Métis Nation. The above article is extracted from a presentation made to MCC BC in 2019. Ewert Fisher notes that MCC is currently working in Vietnam with victims of Agent Orange, a defoliant used by the U.S. military during the war to weed out the Viet Cong. Numerous birth defects are attributed to the aftereffects of Agent Orange. She also remarks that the Mennonite Church in Vietnam consists of some 90 congregations.

MCC: Partnering for Peace in Colombia

By Shelley Dueck, Colombia learning tour participant, MCC BC

Chocó, an isolated region in Colombia that is neglected by its government and the world, is seemingly forgotten. Still, hope stirs. The Colombian Mennonite Brethren Church pastors continue to hope, pray and live out the Good News through a partnership with Mennonite Central Committee. They offer support to the communities along the San Juan River in three priority areas: relief supplies, sustainable development, and peace initiatives in the name of Christ.

On our MCC learning tour to Chocó, we walked single file down the narrow sidewalk of Istmina to the bank of the San Juan River. Carefully, we navigated down twenty-two concrete stairs to the river's edge. One by one we steadied ourselves on a thirty-foot riverboat, sitting two or three across on a wooden plank, preparing to embark on a thirty-minute journey up the river.

Our boat travelled upstream against the current. Along the banks of the river, women were washing clothes and kids played in the contaminated water. When the river overflowed in February 2019, people's homes and livelihoods were washed down the river. Five hundred families struggled to begin again. Relief aid included a two-month supply of food rations, a stovetop, and basic household items and tools. The food rations and tools not only provided for urgent survival needs, but offered hope to these resilient people who were once again rebuilding their lives.

Boats we travelled in up and down the San Juan river.
All photos courtesy of Shelley Dueck

Building dignity in the people.

We travelled twenty-five minutes and arrived at the small village of Bocas de Suruco. Silence surrounded us as we walked towards a large open area in front of the Mennonite Brethren Church. As we approached the church, we heard the excited sounds of children's voices. Inside, a youth club called Faith & Hope was meeting. The children were waiting for crayons that were stored on the second floor of the church where the supplies had been quickly moved during the flood. The peace club used to meet outdoors in front of the church but had been forced to move inside the sanctuary because of a recent armed confrontation in the open square in front of the church. Peace is not an abstract ideal here. It's a daily longing

The peace club topics range from talking about peaceful ways of greeting one another, to practising assertive communication skills and resolving conflict through conversation. The youth and children are eager to find new ways to live, to be a generation that resists conflict, to be influencers for peace in their schools and communities.

We arrived at *Fagrotes – Fundación Agropecuaria Tejiendo Esperanza*, or Weaving Hope Agricultural Foundation – an MCC agricultural partner. Their aim is to provide sustainable farming practices and secure long-

Wall art in Bogota—"Peace"

term livelihoods for participating farmers. *Fagrotes* offers crop-planting alternatives to farmers who have previously grown coca, the plant that produces cocaine for the drug trade. They now grow cacao, which produces cocoa beans for making chocolate.

One hundred and twenty farmers have partnered with *Fagrotes* to grow cacao and rice as cash crops to provide for their families. The farmers' income has become more regular and substantial; food production in the region has increased; and crops that contribute to the drug trade have declined. All of this has taken place with the ongoing risk posed by the armed groups in the region that are losing growers for their product and men and boys to the armed conflict.

Pastor Rutilio, Director of *Fagrotes* emphasizes, "We want to see people living differently, to see agriculture being strong here in this region, big rice crops or cacao crops, and know that people have the income they deserve and that they are able to live better lives with dignity."

MCC's partnership with the Mennonite and the Mennonite Brethren Churches in Colombia came about via a joint invitation from both conferences to start a program in Bogotá in 2002. In Colombia, MCC works exclusively through the churches, since the pastors are the direct link to the communities and to the needs that are ever-present and growing. With ongoing political instability and armed conflict, the country's social fabric continues to be weakened. Amid these complexities, MCC's partnership with the Mennonite Churches in Colombia offers hope.

Chocó

You are not forgotten
Many feelings, no words
Emily, a girl with sparkle, attentiveness and leadership
Fighting to communicate, fighting to survive;
Naming the forgotten, no longer faceless;
Giggles, smiles, X's & O's;
A fingerprint on my heart;
Stories to be told;
Emily.

Shelly Dueck currently lives in Abbotsford, BC, with her husband Gil and their three lovely daughters. She has been serving with MCC BC for three years on the Communication and Donor Relations Team. She also invested 20 years supporting adults with intellectual and physical disabilities and is richer in character and relationships because of this time. Using her gifts and skills to empower the vulnerable and marginalized is her passion and call.

Cocoa beans ready for harvest.

MCC Assistance in Kenya

By Meg Gerbrandt-Wiebe

About a decade ago, when I was on the MCC BC Board, an elderly former MCC service worker approached me during an Annual General Meeting gathering. He said, with some indignation, that when he and his wife had been international MCC service workers in the 1960s, there were many more service workers stationed all over the world than there were now, and what was wrong with MCC was that we weren't sending more workers into the field to "do the job." This attitude was certainly in keeping with how most international NGOs (non-governmental organizations) used to work.

The beginning of MCC's work in Kenya was in 1962, just when Kenya was about to gain its long-sought independence from British colonial rule. MCC implemented the Teachers Abroad Program (TAP), sending 120 Western university graduates to teach in Kenyan schools. Well-meaning though this was, it was not a partnership model; rather, it was Western teachers delivering a Western model of education to newly liberated Kenyans struggling to rediscover the African culture they had brutally lost over several centuries. The pain and hurt of colonial rule in Kenya still run very deep. Since those days, most worldwide NGOs have transitioned to a much more sensitive and progressive model of bringing relief and development to developing countries, as has MCC.

In my recent work as the MCC Kenya Education Coordinator, my task was to come alongside five national education partners and one national maternal health organization which have a carefully formulated vision for bringing relief and development to the poorest of the poor. We invite local partners who share the values and vision of MCC to allow us to work alongside them with donor funds, technical support, reporting assistance, and capacity building. The Coordinator doesn't deliver programs, but assists our Kenyan colleagues to deliver their own relief, development and peacebuilding programs. For example, the Kenyan government abolished corporal punishment in the schools in 2010. Although this is now entrenched in the Kenyan constitution, we know that "paper to practice" takes a long time, often a generation, or 25 years. Offering strategies for positive classroom management was part of my work. Also, over the last three years, I've been focused on developing our partner teachers' skill set for delivering a more child-centred, competency-based curriculum which the Ministry of Education has introduced. I also assisted our partners in developing and implementing Safeguarding Minors policies. The partners then go on to train their own communities.

These local partners have a deep love and care for their own people. They don't need Westerners to "do the job" for them, but they do need and value our plentiful resources and assistance. It's been my great honour and pleasure to come alongside our Kenyan partners in bringing more hopeful futures to many Kenyans over the last three years.

The following two photos illustrate MCC-assisted work in Kenya:

Photo 1

Photo 1: This is Sylvia Odula, an 18-year-old single mother and Maternal Health Care Group volunteer, practising the concepts she learned in the Safeguarding Minors Workshop on February 18, 2020, so that she can then teach her own Care Group of ten pregnant and lactating mothers. In the group photo below, she's sitting with her baby on the far left.

Photo 2: I facilitated a day long workshop on February 18, 2020, with Maternal Health Care Group Mothers, focused on Safeguarding Minors. This MCC project is located in Mukuru Kwa Ruben Slum, one of the oldest and biggest slums in Nairobi. These eighteen local volunteer leaders take their responsibilities very seriously. The men in the photo are project facilitators. We have two local men and one woman who train eighteen groups of pregnant and lactating women every week in better health care, nutrition, and pre- and post-natal care. They work together as a team. The women appreciate the respectful modelling that our two male facilitators demonstrate in their gender relationships, and sometimes ask their husbands and boyfriends to sit in and listen.

Mary-Esther Gerbrandt-Wiebe, known as Meg, has deep roots in both the Canadian Prairies and the Pacific Northwest. Meg grew up in Southern Manitoba Mennonite communities. After a happy and rewarding public school teaching career in Winnipeg and Abbotsford, she accepted a three-year international assignment with MCC in Kenya, where she focused on supporting education projects and training partners in Child Protection Policies and Safeguarding Minors. Meg has two adult married children living on opposite sides of the continent.

The Coordinator doesn't deliver programs, but assists our Kenyan colleagues to deliver their own relief, development and peacebuilding programs.

Photo 2

Conflicts with the Law: Mennonites, Hutterites and Doukhobors

(This article was previously published in *BC History*, Summer 2019.)

By Vern Giesbrecht

Portrait of Menno Simons painted by Jan Luyken, 1681.
Image source: Wikipedia

Three European-based religious groups who emigrated to Canada in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries faced numerous challenges as they adapted to life in a new country. For Mennonites, Hutterites and Doukhobors, these challenges included federal and provincial laws that sometimes conflicted with their desire to practise communal living, educate their children in their own schools, and remain true to their nonviolent beliefs by avoiding military service. At various times, federal or provincial governments denied these groups entry into Canada, restricted their purchase of land, forced their children into public schools, or barred them from voting unless they had fought for Canada in one of the world wars.

The Provincial Elections Act Amendment Act of April 3, 1947, specifically barred Mennonites, Hutterites and Doukhobors from voting in British Columbia (unless they had served in the armed forces). The same Act restored the vote to two previously disenfranchised groups, Chinese-Canadians and "Hindus."

Mennonites and Hutterites, with origins in Switzerland and Italy at the time of the Protestant Reformation in the early 1500s, and Doukhobors, originating in Russia about 1700, have much in common, including pacifism, a strong belief in the Bible, preference for communal living (Mennonites less so than the other two groups), and a long history of persecution that forced them to migrate many times.

All three groups immigrated from Russia

Another commonality is their long residence in Russia, a country many families from these three groups moved to at the invitation of Tsarina Catherine the Great in the 1770s.

Mennonites, by far the largest of the three groups (the 1941 Canadian census listed 106,000 Mennonites, 5,000 Hutterites and 17,000 Doukhobors (Janzen 4)), take their name from Menno Simons (1496-1561), a former Catholic priest from Friesland (Netherlands) (Wiki "Menno" 1). After his transfer to Witmarsum, he met some of the Anabaptists who had come from Switzerland, preaching and teaching "believer's baptism" (as opposed to infant baptism). He also began reading the Bible, which he had not done before. After experiencing a religious conversion, he rejected the Catholic Church in 1537 and became ordained as an Anabaptist minister the next year. Within a short time, he became the most influential Anabaptist leader and, by 1544, the term "Mennonite" or "Mennist" was used to refer to Dutch Anabaptists (Wiki "Menno" 1). For most of his remaining life, Simons had to flee repeatedly because he had a price on his head, and was hated by Catholics and Lutherans alike for what were considered heretical views. Unlike Jacob Hutter, founder of the Hutterites, Simons died of natural causes at the age of 65.

Jacob Hutter was born in Moos, Tyrol County (in present-day Italy), in 1500 (exact date unknown), became a hatmaker and joined the Anabaptist movement in Klagenfurt (in present-day Austria), soon forming several small congregations. He fled to Moravia in 1533 because Anabaptists in the Tyrol area were being severely persecuted by Hapsburg authorities.

For a while, Anabaptism flourished under Hutter's leadership, with several congregations adopting "the ear-

ly Christian practice of communal ownership of goods, in addition to their Anabaptist beliefs of nonviolence and adult baptism" (Wiki "Hutter" 1). Before long, however, all Anabaptists were expelled from Moravia. Hutter was arrested and tortured at Innsbruck and finally burned at the stake on February 25, 1536, at age 36; he was one of 360 Anabaptists executed in Tyrol (Wiki "Hutter" 1).

Historians are not certain when Doukhobors (the Russian word means "Spirit-Warriors/Wrestlers") originated, but the first written records are from the 1700s (Wiki "Doukhobors" 1). Doukhobors generally lived in their own villages, rejected personal materialism, the Russian Orthodox priesthood, and bearing arms, and "developed a tradition of oral history and memorizing and singing hymns and verses…. [T]heir goal was to internalize the living spirit of God so that God's spirit would be revealed within each individual" (Wiki "Doukhobors" 2).

Jacob Hutter.
Image source: Wikipedia

Because of their anti-militaristic stance, the Doukhobors were harshly oppressed in Imperial Russia, but in 1802 Emperor Alexander I encouraged Doukhobors and other religious minorities, including Mennonites from Prussia, to settle in the region around the Molochnaya River (today part of Ukraine). For the rest of the century, various Russian rulers tried to force the Doukhobors to assimilate and obey laws requiring them to register marriages and births, swear oaths of allegiance, contribute grain to state emergency funds and, at times, bear arms. Not long after a dramatic burning of guns by the Doukhobors in June 1895 and the forced exile of 4,000 Doukhobors to villages in Georgia (Russia) where many died of starvation and exposure, emigration to Canada seemed a logical move.

Emigration to Canada

In 1897, the Russian government agreed to let the Doukhobors leave the country, subject to three main conditions:

- The emigrants should never return.
- They had to pay their own costs to move to Canada.
- Any Doukhobor leaders currently in prison or exile in Siberia would have to serve the balance of their sentences before they could leave (Wiki "Doukhobors" 5).

Eventually, about 6,000 members of the sect came to the Canadian prairies in 1899 because Canada offered land, transportation and financial aid.

Many of the Doukhobor immigrants were of peasant origin and adapted well to life in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, working as farmers, loggers, lumbermen and carpenters, but a subgroup (later known as Sons of Freedom) caused controversy with nude protests against compulsory military service. The Doukhobors' resistance to homesteading regulations requiring individual land ownership and to swearing allegiance to the Crown led to another mass migration from 1908 to 1912, this time to the West Kootenays of British Columbia ("Brief History" 1).

As for the Mennonites, they had been concentrated in the Danzig area of Poland and in West Prussia since about 1530, but when Tsarina Catherine the Great of Russia invited Mennonites to farm the Ukrainian steppes near the Dnieper River (north of the Black Sea) in exchange for religious freedom, military exemption, and the right to speak German and govern their own affairs, thousands of them made the long trek in the late 1780s.

The new settlers, most speaking German or Plautdietsch (a "Low German" dialect), established numerous villages and flourished for decades, some becoming wealthy landowners, but eventually the erosion of religious freedom, the horrors of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath, and the hardships of World War II led to three major migrations: in the 1870s, the 1920s, and 1940s.

More than 36,000 Mennonites crossed the ocean to live in Canada, the United States, Mexico, Paraguay and other countries during these three migrations. The second migration was delayed for three years after a federal Order-in-Council in June 1919 prohibited Mennonites, as well as Hutterites and Doukhobors, from coming to Canada. As was the case in various voting bans by federal and provincial governments, the chief reason was the pacifist stance of these three groups.

Appeals by the Mennonites and Hutterites were ultimately successful. Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King pushed through an Order-in-Council rescinding the ban for these two groups on June 2, 1922 (Janzen 15). About 21,000 Mennonites came to Canada in the next several years after the ban was lifted. Doukhobors, however, had to wait for four more years before

their ban was lifted. Ironically, the same Liberal government that rescinded these bans on immigration went on to impose restrictions on Chinese immigration in 1923.

The third wave of Mennonite immigration occurred after World War II, but only a portion of the Mennonites, desperate to leave, were able to do so. Many Mennonites were accused of collaborating with the Germans and forcibly relocated to the Gulag (labour camps) in Siberia and Kazakhstan as the tide of war turned in the Allies' favour, but eventually about 7,700 were able to emigrate to Canada after the war ended, many of them settling in BC (Wiki "Mennonites" 5-6).

Hutterites first arrived in Canada in 1918, mostly from the United States where conscription was in force. They settled in the prairie provinces and established small colonies of about fifteen families each. For several decades, their communal way of life and self-sufficiency raised little opposition, but by the 1940s, public attitudes had changed. Critics of the Hutterite way of life pointed to their reluctance to send their children to public schools, to participate in the social life of their communities, or to shop locally – they tended to make bulk purchases for their communes in larger centres (Janzen 61). Eventually, public pressure prompted the governments of the three prairie provinces to restrict the Hutterites' right to hold land communally (Janzen 62).

Conflicts over schooling

Mennonites, Hutterites and Doukhobors frequently came into conflict with Canadian authorities over education. Conservative Mennonites left for Mexico because of schooling wrangles, but in general, Mennonites and Hutterites were able to make compromises with various provincial governments on contentious schooling issues. Doukhobors had long and bitter fights, especially with the BC government, which eventually seized 170 children and forced them to attend public schools in New Denver in the 1950s.

There were arguments over whether schooling could be in German (for Mennonites and Hutterites), control over curriculum, and whether Hutterites could have their own schools on their colonies. For many Doukhobors, who were adamantly against the whole concept of public schools, the issues were much more complex. The Doukhobors' opposition to public schooling focused on three points: it leads to militarism; it is not practical; and it alienates people from one another, thus militating against community life (Janzen 127).

William Blackmore, the Nelson newspaper editor who headed a Royal Commission in 1912 and spent four months with the Doukhobors, wrote a report that was full of praise for the Doukhobors' enterprising, congenial, communal way of life. He suggested gentle measures to encourage compromises in education matters as well as other issues such as registering births, deaths and marriages, which Doukhobors had steadfastly refused to do. However, when at the very end of his report he recommended cancellation of their military service exemption, a furor arose, as Doukhobors feared their suspicions were coming true: there was a connection between registration, school attendance and military service (Janzen 127).

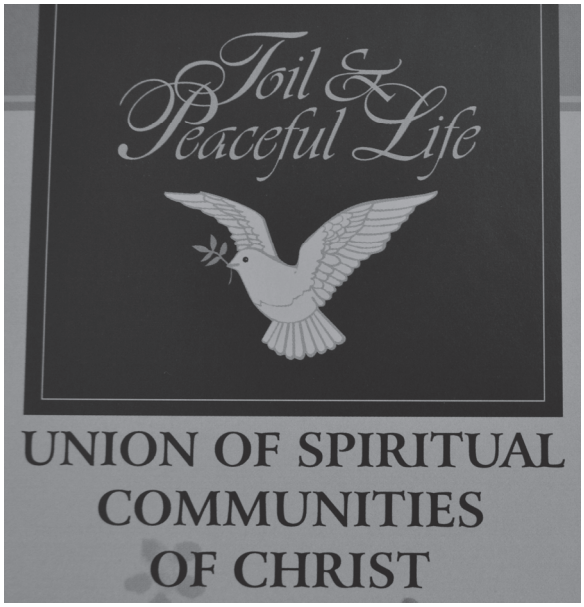
Complicating the Doukhobor school issue were repeated acts of property destruction, nude protests and arrests that went on intermittently for decades – in 1923 alone, ten schools were burned in Brilliant, BC, reportedly by the radical Sons of Freedom branch of Doukhobors.

Although there were periods of peace when Doukhobors obeyed the law and sent their children to public schools, the often violent disputes between the Community Doukhobors (the largest faction) and the Sons of Freedom, involving more that 100 acts of destruction between 1944 and 1947, led to another inquiry, this one led by Judge H. Sullivan. The burning of Community Doukhobor leader John J. Verigin's house and a $400,000 jam factory in Brilliant (formerly owned by Community Doukhobors) were two of the most blatant incidents to prompt the inquiry (Janzen 136). During a four-month series of hearings, one Doukhobor told the judge that "schools, forced upon them by the government, were destroyed by fire because schools are propagators of a false conception of civilization, patronizing the beast, militarism" (Janzen 136).

Sullivan's brief recommendations, which urged that Doukhobor children be educated with a view toward assimilation, were not acted upon, nor were the ideas put forward by yet another commission, this one chaired by University of British Columbia anthropologist H. B. Hawthorn. This commission showed considerable sympathy and respect for the Doukhobors but also called for compliance with the laws, urging a "balance of pressures and inducements" to achieve this (Janzen 137).

Before any action could be taken, the Liberal-Conservative coalition that had commissioned the study was defeated in 1952 by William A. C. Bennett's new Social Credit Party, which took a harder line against the Doukhobors. Not long after Social Credit achieved majority status in the 1953 election, 148 Doukhobor adults

were arrested for parading nude near a school and sentenced to three years in Oakalla Prison. Then, raids were carried out in Krestova and other Doukhobor strongholds, and a total of 170 children were removed from their homes and forced to attend public school in New Denver. This forced schooling lasted six years, until 1959, when a delegation of thirty parents convinced a judge in Nelson to return the children on a promise that they would willingly attend public schools in their communities (Janzen 139).



Motto on a Doukhobor pamphlet. Photo source: Julia M. Toews files.

Anti-Mennonite sentiment during World War II

During the Second World War, there was considerable anti-Mennonite sentiment in the Fraser Valley, where approximately 4,000 Mennonites lived in communities such as Yarrow, Greendale, Arnold and Clearbrook. In newspaper articles and editorial, Mennonites were accused of being shirkers because of their anti-war stance, as well as "land-hungry" farmers keen to snap up the best acreages, including land left vacant when Japanese-Canadians were removed from coastal areas and forcibly relocated to the interior of the province.

In a fiery speech, Gordon Towers, newly elected president of the Associated Boards of Trade of the Fraser Valley, called them a "menace" and said that unless their settlements were curbed from expanding, they would eventually swamp the valley as the Japanese did. He added, "If it took a Pearl Harbor to get the Japanese out of the coast area, it will take a similar disaster to influence Ottawa to remove the Mennonites ("Associated Boards," *Chilliwack Progress* 1). Two inflammatory letters to the *Chilliwack Progress* slammed Mennonites in Yarrow for "teaching the Hitler language to their children" as well as for sending only 34 men (out of 1,200 eligible) to fight in the war ("Letters," *Chilliwack Progress*).

Hutterites, Mennonites, Doukhobors and others who claimed conscientious objector (CO) status often faced derisive questioning from the boards set up to rule on their applications. Prominent Mennonite leader David Toews cited one example: "A boy came before the Board. 'Are you a Mennonite and a Conscientious Objector?' Answer: 'Yes, and besides … I am a farmer and I am the only one working on the farm.' Answer: 'I do not care a hoot about your farm, we want you, your application is not accepted, get out!'" (qtd in Janzen 221) In 1943, eighteen Mennonite men who had not been recognized as COs refused to report for military training and were jailed for twelve months with hard labour (Janzen 227).

A surprisingly large number of Mennonite men did defy their church's pacifist beliefs and served in the military. About 4,500 out of 17,000 eligible Mennonite men in Canada went to war: between 500 and 600 were killed in action (Giesbrecht 10). Another 7,500 Mennonites did alternative service, often in BC forestry camps, but also in hospitals, mental institutions, and various industries, as well as at the front as medics or orderlies. Alternative service workers were paid only 50 cents a day. Although Hutterites and Doukhobors were well represented in alternative service camps, as were other groups such as Quakers, a majority of Canadian COs, perhaps 63 percent, were Mennonites (Giesbrecht 11).

Two of these camps were located near Radium Hot Springs in what is now Kootenay National Park. Most of the COs in these two camps were Mennonites, Hutterites, or Jehovah's Witnesses. Ray Crook, a truck driver who delivered supplies to the camps, said the Mennonite men (who arrived at the camp first and were the only workers there for some months) were "nice people and very hard-working. My father was a bush foreman for many years and he told me he had never worked with a bunch of finer men in his life." Crook said the accommodations were very primitive, "just bunkhouses covered with tarpaper" and in the coldest winter months, "the men almost froze" (qtd in Florence 6, 7).

In time, the participation of Mennonites and other COs in alternative service programs, as well as $2 million in Mennonite donations to the Red Cross (some voluntary, some collected from alternative service workers), lessened public antipathy to "Conchies," as the COs were called.

Voting rights restricted, restored, restricted, restored again

Although the first wave of Mennonites who arrived in Canada in 1873 had been promised exemption from military service by a federal Order-in-Council, the First World War changed things. Because they spoke an "enemy language" (German) and most refused to fight, they lost the right to vote, as did Hutterites and Doukhobors.

John J. Verigin Jr. Photo source: www.usccdoukhobors.org

In a stinging editorial, the *Winnipeg Free Press* rejoiced when further anti-Mennonite legislation was passed in 1919, barring further Mennonite immigration (Hutterites and Doukhobors were also kept out): "We do not want in Canada anybody who is not prepared to become a citizen in the full sense of the word…. People of peculiar religion, living in colonies and clinging to an alien tongue and to racial habits are from every point of view undesirable…. If this country is not good enough to fight for, it is not good enough to live in" (qtd in Janzen 183).

Mennonites regained voting rights at the federal level in 1920, when the Dominion Election Act superseded the Wartime Elections Act, but in 1931 the BC government disenfranchised them because of their exemption from military service – although only Doukhobors were singled out by name in this amendment.

At the federal level, the 1934 Dominion Elections Act debate showed great animosity toward the Doukhobors' social view and "indecent behaviour." A. W. Neill, the independent Member of Parliament (MP) for Comox-Alberni, said that only "sickly sentimental" MPs wanted Doukhobors to have the franchise ("History" 84). Co-operative Commonwealth Federation leader (CCF) J. S. Woodsworth, however, strongly supported the Doukhobors, praising their industriousness and protesting against "religious tenets being made the basis for disenfranchisement." He pointed out that the Doukhobors could hardly become good citizens if they and their descendants were disenfranchised ("History" 84).

A motion to give Doukhobors the vote was defeated in 1934 and again four years later, and it wasn't until 1955 that they regained the right to vote federally. Mennonites and Hutterites also regained their federal voting rights at that time. Because the 1931 amendment mentioned only Doukhobors by name, some Mennonites had continued to vote in the 1930s and 1940s, although their right to do so was sometimes challenged on voting day. Hutterites rarely voted, so the voting ban had little effect on them, either in 1931 or 1947.

BC's Provincial Elections Act Amendment Act of 1947 that denied Mennonites, Hutterites and Doukhobors the vote was ignored by Vancouver and Victoria newspapers. In fact, the story was first published by the *Chilliwack Progress*. Chilliwack Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) Leslie Eyres was surprised and furious at the legislation, stating, "It was unfortunate this situation should have arisen at a time when we are trying to foster the goodwill of these hardworking people," he said ("Vote Ruling"). Chilliwack lawyers opposed the legislation in letters to Eyres and Attorney-General Gordon Wismer, and a *Chilliwack Progress* editorial termed the law "iniquitous" and "discriminatory" ("Votes for Mennonites").

Reaction was muted in the much smaller Doukhobor and Hutterite communities, perhaps because these groups were unlikely to vote anyway.

For Mennonites and Hutterites, the voting ban was repealed with little fanfare a year later, April 27, 1948. Doukhobors, however, had to wait until 1953 to have their voting rights restored, in part because of numerous objections raised during hearings by a research committee headed by University of British Columbia anthropology professor Harry B. Hawthorn.

The ten objections included the Doukhobors' reluctance to engage in war, register births, deaths and marriages, and take part in the census ("Doukhobors of BC" 213-215). Hawthorn and his committee refuted each of these objections, at least in part, and recommended restoring their voting rights, as did the *Vancouver Sun*. In an editorial, the *Sun* argued that the 8,000 "good Doukhobors" should not be penalized for the nude protests and arsons of the radical Sons of Freedom group: "Votes have been given to Chinese and Japanese Canadians and East Indians. This government should now prepare to remove the last racial-religious bar to the ballot by opening it to law-abiding Doukhobors" ("Doukhobors should vote").

Doukhobors finally regained the right to vote in BC on October 27, 1953, but as with the Hutterites, participation in voting remained low, as it does to this day. John Verigin, Jr., current leader of the Union of Spiritual

Communities of Christ (Community Doukhobors) in Grand Forks, said losing the provincial vote back in 1947 "wasn't a big deal." Verigin added, "We [Community Doukhobors] don't vote in provincial or federal level, but we don't condemn those who do. We often do vote at the local level, however" ("Interview Verigin").

Dave Hofer, manager of the Peace View Hutterite Colony in Fort St. John, one of the two colonies in BC in 2019 (the other is South Peace; each colony has 115 members), claims that no Hutterites lived in BC in 1947, although there were numerous colonies in the prairie provinces (335 colonies in 2019). He says Hutterite resistance to voting during World War II was based on the belief that income tax was being used as a "war tax." Even today, after many years without a major war, he believes that few Hutterites exercise their voting rights in provincial or federal elections ("Interview Hofer").

By contrast, the larger Mennonite population has had much higher voter turnouts, and, despite reluctance by conservative Mennonites to be involved in politics in any form, including running for political office, a significant number of Mennonites have been elected at the local, provincial, and federal levels for several decades, some holding cabinet posts at the provincial or federal levels. Current Abbotsford Mayor Henry Braun is one of many examples.

Historian James Urry notes that "Although registered as voters in the late 1870s, at first few Mennonites voted in either provincial or federal elections. …This fact did not go unnoticed by politicians who viewed Mennonites as a potential political force because in certain electoral ridings, if they voted, they could influence the outcome. As a consequence, Mennonites were a people to be wooed, or at least not alienated" (165).

The importance of the Mennonite vote (they comprised 34 percent of Matsqui voters and 27 percent of Chilliwack voters in the late 1940s) was alluded to by CCF whip Herbert Gargrave when Mennonite voting rights were restored in 1948: "They weren't granted the franchise because they all voted one way, were they?" he asked, referring to strong Mennonite support for Chilliwack MLA L. H. Eyres in the 1945 election (qtd in Siemens 81).

Attorney-General Gordon Wismer was quick to respond: "They are a fine type of people who should be given the vote; they are very intelligent, so it's only natural that they should vote for a good government ("Defeat").

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Vern Giesbrecht grew up in Clearbrook and graduated from the Mennonite Educational Institute. He studied at Western Washington College, the University of Victoria and the University of BC to prepare for careers in journalism and teaching. Since retirement, he has written articles for various magazines and newspapers, including BC History Magazine *and* Roots and Branches.

Genealogy Corner: The Ties that Bind

Jakob Martens – Director of the School for the Poor
(*Jakob Martens – der Armenschuldirektor*)
From Gerhard Lorenz: *lose blätter* [*loose leaves*] III. Teil. Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1976. 13-16.

Translated by Robert Martens

Jakob Martens (right) and Bernhard Fast.
Photo source: Robert Martens.

Around 1894 and in the years following, Mennonites settled near Davlekanovo, in the province of Ufa. The settlement grew rapidly. It differed from the usual pattern of Mennonite settlements in Russia in that people here did not create closed villages, but lived in single farms or in small group settlements. Other German[-speaking] farmers settled near the Mennonites. Some of the settlers were extremely poor and, because [their farms were] so dispersed, could not send their children to school. And so these children grew up without adequate education.

This need touched the heart of a Mennonite landowner, Franz Klassen. Klassen had bought a farm property of 3,000 *desyatins* (8,400 acres), including all equipment and supplies, from the Russian owner. Klassen prospered financially. He was a philanthropist. He built a boarding school. Over the door of the school was inscribed, "For Everyone," and so it was. Here, children were accepted regardless of confession, though to be sure most were Mennonite. During the school year, the children received everything they needed for their upkeep. If the parents were able to pay something, they did so, but many paid nothing. Klassen covered all expenses. The school had about one hundred students.

In 1901 Franz Klassen met with teacher and preacher Jakob Martens. Klassen gave him fifty *desyatins* (140 acres), along with the buildings situated on it, on condition that Martens would continue the school project that Klassen had in mind. The school and property were located in the vicinity of the village of Berezovka.

Martens took on the proposal after a lengthy inner struggle. The school was subsequently registered in his name. It comprised four classes, as was the custom in Mennonite village schools. Later, a fifth class was added. Martens dedicated his entire attractive farm property to this work. The houseparents, teachers, and students lived very sparingly during the first years, since there were many students but little income. In time, the situation improved considerably. The school was an act of faith, and existed on whatever people could donate. Like other men in our circles who have found themselves in similar circumstances, Martens discovered enough "good Samaritans" who were willing to support such a project "for the sake of Christ."

Let us now become acquainted with the director of the institution, Jakob Martens. He belongs to that number of men who are worthy of our love and gratitude.

Jakob Martens was born in Muntau, Molotschna Colony, on April 20, 1861. His father and grandfather were prominent and respected church leaders in our community. Jakob attended, and then graduated from the high school in Halbstadt, and did the same in the teachers' institute. He received the teachers' certificate from the government, something few were able to do in those days.

Martens studied under the notable instructors P. M. Friesen, Hermann Lenzmann, and H[einrich] Franz II. Already in his younger years, Jakob Martens had given his heart to the Lord and promised to dedicate his entire life to him.

In 1878 his parents moved from Molotschna to Orloff, Zagradovka Colony. There, Martens worked as a teacher for three years in the village of Nikolaidorf, where his accomplishments caught the attention of the surrounding communities. He then taught for five years in Orloff, before taking over the private high school in the same village. Here he worked two more years.

Martens had a talent for inspiring a love for education in his students. Many of his pupils drew from him the sustained impulse to continue on with their education. A great number of them became teachers and preachers in our community.

Besides his work in education, Martens concerned himself with the village youth. With continuing persis-

tence and devotion, he crafted a systematic character for Sunday afternoons. These Sundays were both religious and edifying. At that time, choir singing was not well-known; Martens introduced it. For many of the older generation, this constituted a considerable novelty. It was customary to conduct Bible studies with illustrations and applications. Martens knew how to develop biblical teachings intriguingly and lucidly, and to how to clarify them with lively illustrations. He acted upon the intellect, heart, and emotions. For example, in order to contemplate the greatness and omnipotence of God, an appropriate Psalm was read, which he then explicated through a short, interesting lecture on the wonders of the stars, or on something from the realm of animals. Biographies were presented of persons from the Bible, the world, or church history. Choir and solo performances took place. Martens instructed lovers of music in the playing of the flute or violin. Occasionally, singing was accompanied by musicians. In those days, that was something new, and practised in very few places. There were few books available in those days, and newspapers, radio, and so on, were unknown. At that time, it was possible for a capable man to become a spiritual father who could unlock a new world for his listeners. If that man were also devout, his influence extended into the inner life of many, especially the youth.

Under Martens' leadership, and primarily with his own finances, a youth library was established in the village of Orloff. On the shelves were three youth newspapers: *Der Kinderbote* [*Children's Messenger*], *Der Friedensbote* [*Messenger of Peace*], and *Das Jugendblatt* [*Youth Newspaper*]. In order to promote the reading of the Bible among youth, Martens acquired Bible study cards [*Bibellesezettel*]. As a result of this guidance, some of these young people later regularly used these cards to study the Bible. What that accomplished for their lives is easy to imagine.

Due to declining health, Martens was forced to give up teaching; this saddened both young and old. Martens bought a farm property in the village of Altenau. The large church of Nikolaifeld, Zagradovka Colony, now appointed him as preacher, and shortly afterwards, as travelling minister. This calling spoke to the depths of his heart, and he devoted himself with all his energy to his labours. Over time he likely visited most of the places in Russia where Mennonites resided, preaching penitence before God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He was an arousing preacher, quickly finding the key to the hearts of those with whom he worked.

In 1896 Martens moved to the settlement in Ufa. Here he continued his labours on behalf of his fellow human beings. Such service was often associated with great sacrifice, danger, and deprivation, since he was frequently called at darkest night, during snowstorms and fierce cold, to serve the sick of body and soul, or those on their deathbeds.

As noted above, in 1901 Martens took over full responsibility of the school for the poor. Founder Franz Klassen left for America in 1905. The work demanded heavy sacrifices from Martens and his wife [Katharina Siemens]. Martens paid close attention to religious instruction. When his Lutheran students submitted to confirmation, their pastor would find them well-versed in biblical knowledge.

This work, dependent on the aid of others, involved, naturally, many difficulties. Dealing with numerous individuals is always problematic. Martens' oldest son, Petrus, was a great help to his father. It was a great blow to [Jakob], however, when his wife forever closed her eyes. Martens' refuge was prayer. He experienced much prayer, especially during the difficult war years, and even more during the time of the Revolution, when everything fell to pieces.

Jakob and Katharina (Siemens) Martens.
Photo source: Robert Martens.

The time also came for Martens when everything was taken from his hands and his rights were eliminated. People such as Martens, who wanted no more than to serve their fellow human beings, were now called enemies of the state because of their religious orientation.

In autumn of 1922 Martens contracted typhus, and the Lord took his weary servant home. He had served as a teacher for forty years, and as a preacher for thirty. He died in his 62nd year. His influence reached well beyond his home settlement. Former students, and many, many others remember him with love and respect. Jakob Martens belongs to those of whom the Word of God speaks: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." [Hebrews 13:7]

The Kingdom of God: Bolivian Mennonites An Interview with Helmut Isaak

By Robert Martens

In 2011 Bolivian Mennonites received global publicity which stereotyped them as regressive, controlling, and sporadically violent. A series of mysterious nocturnal rapes were taking place in Manitoba Colony. Colony elders were at first so baffled by these events that some of them ascribed it to the work of demons. Eventually it was discovered that a group of men were using a drug, perhaps one used by veterinarians, to sedate their victims, who ranged in age from 3 to 60. The men were tried and convicted, and are currently serving terms in a grossly substandard prison.

These are appalling crimes, but Bolivian Mennonites exemplify, of course, much more than a Western headline. In April 2018, I sat down with Helmut Isaak over coffee to learn something about the complex and changing life-style of Mennonites in Bolivia. Helmut is highly qualified to speak on the issue. Born in 1939 in Paraguay, he attended seminary in Uruguay, and went on to postgraduate research in the Netherlands. He has pastored in Canada, taught in Chile, Colombia and Paraguay, and participated in development projects in South America.

Helmut began by disabusing me of my own stereotypes about Bolivia. The cost of living is very low there but the standard of living, relatively high. Many of the Indigenous peoples are doing well, pursuing professional careers. These positive outcomes may have something to do with government regulation restricting the price of social services; for example, doctors are required to perform free work for part of the year. Helmut believes that President Evo Morales, often vilified in the West, is doing a reasonably good job for Bolivia's poor. (Morales is no longer president, having been overthrown by a coup in 2019.)

Christ statue overlooking traffic in Santa Cruz. Photo: Julia M. Toews

In 2012, Helmut Isaak assisted a Bolivian centre that supports victims of abuse. The centre, sponsored by the Evangelical Free Church, is located in Santa Cruz, a city of over one million. Due to health issues, he was forced to return to Canada but during his time in Bolivia he learned a good deal. Helmut told me that traditionalist Mennonites, seeking sanctuary from "the world" and its influences, began moving to Bolivia in the 1950s and 1960s. Various Mennonite splinter groups arrived in the country, among them Old Colony, Sommerfelder, Bergthaler, and Kleine Gemeinde. The latter, says Helmut, are now among the most progressive Mennonites in Bolivia. Children among the Bolivian Kleine Gemeinde receive education to Grade 9, and many go on to Grade 12 and even university. Educating the young is driven by a "desperate need," says Helmut, for professionals such as agronomists, doctors and engineers. Church services among the Kleine Gemeinde do not differ much from those in Canada. Levels of tolerance are high and outsiders are welcome in Kleine Gemeinde colonies.

Cart used to deliver milk to Santa Cruz. Photo: Louise Bergen Price

Bolivian Mennonites have been remarkably successful. "Prosperity," says Helmut, "forces the elders to open up." And yet the vast majority of Mennonites in Bolivia are traditionalist and insular. Their belief, maintains Helmut, is that everyone outside the colony is headed for hell. Inside the colony, even though salvation is regarded as only a hope, not a conviction, Mennonites live in "the kingdom of God." Here there is security and community. Baptism is a key rite in the world of traditionalist Mennonites: marriage is only possible, for example, after baptism. Children receive only a minimal education, perhaps enough to read the Bible. Boys are well trained in mechanics and agriculture; girls are instructed in domestic tasks and to submit to male authority.

Traditionalist colonies are a "living museum" – a fossilized replication of the long-gone way of life practised in Russia (although the Bolivian version is far more insular; Bolivia's Kleine Gemeinde might resemble the Russian model more closely). A well-delineated hierarchy

prevails, elders at the top, followed by preachers and then deacons. Each village is managed by a *Schulze*, or mayor, and the colony by an *Oberschulze*, the chief administrator. Among the top concerns for administrators is a constant search for new land – Bolivian Mennonites double their population every twenty years. Land shortages compel some to move outside colony borders entirely, where renting might be an option. With that kind of move, however, comes some freedom from the strictures of the colony: the use of rubber tires, for instance, whereas within the confines of the colony these are prohibited. Because tractors with "iron wheels" are often prohibited from driving on highways – they tear up the asphalt – "rubber wheels" can be a source of individual liberty, allowing individuals to travel afield. Helmut points out, though, that horse and buggy can be a comfortable form of travel. Buggies are manufactured, he says, with Volkswagen suspensions.

Farming is predominantly subsistence level in traditionalist colonies. A family will grow what it needs to feed itself, with perhaps a cash crop of soybeans on the side. Wealthy Mennonites can be a source of contention and envy to those with less status. In general, though, living is modest, simple, and reasonably egalitarian. But farming families still need to do some shopping. Santa Cruz, within a few hours' drive of most colonies, is the "Mennonite supermarket," as Helmut describes it.

Because driving automobiles is proscribed, taxis are hired for the ride to the big city, or a bus might be rented. Some villages have purchased their own buses, but drivers are always hired: Bolivian locals – or, Helmut says, possibly excommunicated Mennonites. Often the trip to Santa Cruz ends at a major shopping centre crammed with Mennonites; some entrepreneurs have learned to speak Plautdietsch.

Prosperous Mennonite farm close to Santa Cruz.
Photo: Louise Bergen Price

Despite the success of the insular model, there is, Helmut points out, a constant push to modernize. Cellphones are prohibited, and yet "everybody has them." Many Mennonites learn about the world by reading *Die Mennonitische Post*. But the chief tool of communication among Mennonites, says Helmut, is travel. Mennonites are constantly in movement, he says, travelling between Bolivia, Mexico, Paraguay, Canada, and so on. A connection has developed between Mennonites living in Brazil and Mennonites living in conservative BC communities in La Crete, Prespatou, or Burns Lake. There are even those, says Helmut, who farm both in northern BC and in Bolivia – the soil in much of Bolivia is so fertile that two or three crops can be harvested annually.

Bolivian Mennonite colonies are faced with significant challenges. It has been rumoured that the federal government in La Paz is considering stripping Mennonites of their citizenship. While that is unlikely to happen, since Mennonites pack a large economic clout, Helmut observes that "this development forces coordination" on a very fragmented community. And then, says Helmut, "there is so much they can't control anymore." The "iron wheels" ordinance no longer works; bars that are located just over the colony borders draw the young into the world of alcohol and drugs; and evangelical missionaries are a corrosive influence, attempting to assimilate traditionalists into new schools and churches. Parents, says Helmut, may be disciplined or even excommunicated for sending their children to evangelical-run schools. And excommunication means catastrophe, unless offenders publicly confess. Men who refuse to confess leave the colony and find work as mechanics and farmhands; women, untrained for the outside world, with some regularity end up as prostitutes.

Still, the traditionalist lifestyle is characterized by a communality and stability completely lacking in the West. Its success is undeniable: as a Bolivian elder remarked to Helmut Isaak, "How many of your kids make it into church in Canada?"

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Book Reviews

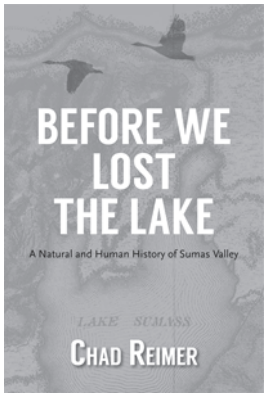
Chad Reimer. *Before We Lost the Lake: A Natural and Human History of Sumas Valley*. Halfmoon Bay, BC: Caitlin Press, 2018. 255 pp.

Reviewed by Robert Martens

> In May and June this prairie is completely covered with water. The Sumass river, from the rapid rise of the Fraser, reverses its course, and flows back into the land instead of out of it. The lake fills, overflows, and completely floods the lower lands. On the subsistence of the waters, we pitched our tents on the edge of a lovely stream. Wildlife were in abundance; the streams were alive with fish; the mules and horses revelling in grass kneedeep – we were in a second Eden! (John Lord, qtd in Reimer 10)

With these words written by British naturalist John Lord in 1866, Chad Reimer begins his history of Sumas Lake, and how it was "lost." He writes, "Much of the Central Fraser Valley was covered by the lake, and when spring freshets arrived, the lake expanded to an incredible size. Millions of waterfowl arrived to breed each year. Salmon and sturgeon teemed in the lake's shallow waters. For local First Peoples, it was in fact a kind of "Eden" – except, perhaps, for the clouds of mosquitoes and midges that unbearably tormented human and beast.

Chad Reimer mentions Mennonites only once in *Before We Lost the Lake*, and yet the relevance of the book to the Mennonite story is obvious. From 1929 onward, Mennonite immigrants and refugees arrived in the warm and fertile Fraser Valley. Their aptitude for farming soon raised them from poverty to prosperity. Yet, few of them – perhaps none – would have questioned the value of draining Sumas Lake, even though a landscape was devastated and, more importantly, writes Reimer, an Aboriginal way of life was stolen.



The author begins with prehistory. It is usually assumed, says Reimer, that the Fraser was the most important of the rivers to flow into the lake. The Nooksack from the south, the Sumas from the northeast, and the Chilliwack from the east all played a greater role in the formation and continuance of the lake than did the Fraser. Then, as early as 7000 BC, the First Peoples arrived. According to Stó:lō oral tradition, the Lake People were called the Semá:th; Sumas Lake was so central to their lives that they called it simply "the lake." Their largest community may have been situated at the mouth of the Sumas River, a key location from which to watch for war parties, particularly the Cowichan, raiding from the west coast.

With the BC Gold Rush of 1858, the ancient ways of the Valley's first peoples changed forever. It is not well known, writes Reimer, that gold miners often travelled north through Semá:th territory, and the local First Nations soon learned to charge them dearly for guiding them and canoeing them across the lake. British and American surveyors, charged with precisely locating the 49th parallel, arrived at roughly the same time (John Lord was among them).

Settlers were appearing in the Fraser Valley as well. Unusually, Reimer writes, many Valley pioneers consisted of entire families – men, women, and children. Their relations with the Semá:th were generally cordial, but epidemics, especially smallpox, arrived with them. The Semá:th had little resistance to European diseases, and they died by the thousands. In Stó:lō oral tradition, the story is told of a village where a single boy remained. He travelled to another village, where he found a single girl survivor. The two then lived together.

The desperate story that followed could have been very different for the Indigenous. James Douglas, the first governor of the colony of British Columbia, was married to a Métis woman and sympathized with the Aboriginals who were being squeezed out of their land by European immigrants. The "Douglas Reserves" that were allocated to the Semá:th under his watch were large, and the local Indigenous expressed their satisfaction. However, Joseph Trutch, a bureaucrat working under Douglas, worked to cut the Semá:th reserves to tiny and often useless plots of land. Fatefully, Trutch was later to become governor of British Columbia.

The vast wetlands of Sumas Lake, writes Reimer, were considered wastelands by European planners and settlers. Nearly from year one of settler arrivals, the drainage, or "reclamation," or even "redemption" of Sumas Lake was visualized. Proposals to drain the lake came and went over the last half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Plans were hampered by government bungling and business scams.

Finally, the reclamation actually happened, to the disbelief of the Semá:th, who had seen so many proposals

and projects fail that they believed the lake would never be drained. But it was, and their way of life vanished after dykes were built, pumps installed, and land moved between 1920 and 1924. Reimer writes, "Planners and engineers of the Sumas drainage project did not foresee the impact of their works on the natural hydrology of the Sumas and Fraser Valleys. Nor did they foresee their effect on Sumas Lake's rich and complex web of plant and animal life. Like others in their profession, the drainage engineers were largely blind to this organic world, what we today call its ecosystem. They viewed the natural world not as a living organism, but as a machine" (208).

A historical bias, yes, but certainly defensible. With his meticulous research, Chad Reimer may have written the definitive story thus far on the draining of Sumas Lake. Reimer earned his PhD at York University and has written several local histories, including *Chilliwack's Chinatowns*. He lives in Chilliwack.

Before We Lost the Lake is available at bookstores and online, and can be accessed in the MHSBC library.

Siemens, Peter. *Spuren im Chacosand: Auf den Wegen des Peter Siemens*. Neuland Colony, Chaco: Self-published, 2018. 115 pp.

Reviewed by David Giesbrecht

In five fast-moving chapters, enriched with numerous black/white and some colour photos, Peter Siemens narrates his tumultuous life as a Paraguayan Mennonite leader. Curiously, Siemens tells much of the story (but not all of it) in a third-person voice, in this way decidedly drawing attention to himself and his work.

In the first chapter Siemens pays tribute to his own rather severe parents, who, as he notes, never once gave him a compliment. He recalls his indifferent attitudes to his early schooling, no doubt largely owing to incompetent teachers. Peter Siemens was no angel. In fact, he is quite candid in confessing to some serious misdeeds and a propensity to alcohol. Adolescence behind him, this chapter ends with an account of his travels to Neuwied, Germany, where he asked for the hand of Maria Derksen from her parents, Peter and Margarethe Derksen.

As is well known, Paraguayan Mennonites were closely connected with President Alfredo Stroessner (1912-2006), and with the highest government officials in the country, resulting in lucrative benefits for these hard-working German-speaking colonists. A letter from Stroessner on page 31 testifies to the warm relationship between Siemens and the president. Siemens is certainly very aware of his political persona; on page 32 he lists his extensive political activities.

Political privileges often court political risks. Quite candidly, Siemens tells of a financial disaster. In 1981 he was accused of financial mismanagement, for which he was assessed a heavy fine. For him, however, this affair seems to have been only a momentary setback.

Siemens' central endeavour in this publication is to provide an account of his time as *Oberschulze* (mayor or executive official) of Neuland Colony. He confesses to being ambivalent about the position, but was eager "to play with fire" (47). His candidacy was far from certain, given the grasp on the office Heinrich Dyck seemed to have at the time. When a very contentious voting process was completed, Peter Siemens indeed emerged as the *Oberschulze*. He began his tenure in January 1988, the youngest candidate ever to accede to this office.

This telling makes clear that Siemens had an extraordinarily productive time as *Oberschulze*, although not without a lot of conflict with colony employees, especially regarding the management of finances. Between pages 52 and 57, Siemens lists all his initiatives and successes that occurred during his time as *Oberschulze*, including new street and school construction and the allocation of a piece of land in Neuland for Catholic believers to build their church. He also lists 31 major (revolutionary he calls them) developments that occurred in this Mennonite colony during his administration (58-61). He ends this compilation by signing off as "a revolutionary with a broad vision."

The remainder of this book includes a descriptive potpourri of colony living, together with Siemens' own personal reflections:

* He provides for instance, the account of a local meeting with the diminutive General Lino Oviedo, President Stroessner's successor. Siemens scorns Karl Heinz Unger's unflattering welcome in which Unger made light of the general's small stature.
* Condescendingly, Siemens berates Helmut Giesbrecht for his boorish behaviour.
* On page 69 Siemens again reviews his accomplishments as *Oberschulze*, noting that in total he served in this office for 13 years and 11 months, ending his term in office in 2015. When his son asked him what really had been his motivation for public service, the father confessed to

Irene Enns and Marilyn Vooys at the opening of their art show *Mennonite Gals Can Paint* at MHM. Photo: Jennifer Martens.

Irene Enns and Marilyn Vooys, Gallery Opening, February 8, 2020, Mennonite Heritage Museum

Reported by Robert Martens

During his introduction of artists Irene Enns and Marilyn Vooys, Richard Thiessen noted that many of the visitors to the gallery that day may have been new to the Mennonite Heritage Museum. Many of the attendees were co-members with Enns and Vooys of the Fraser Valley Watermedia Society (formerly Fraser Valley Watercolour Society), and they were there to show support for the featured artists.

Thiessen expressed appreciation for Irene Enns' depiction of artwork as gently nudging images of the soul to others. He then remarked on the diversity of Marilyn Vooys' artistic talents, recalling that she had once mounted a photography exhibit at Columbia Bible College when Thiessen was head librarian there.

The two artists spoke briefly. Vooys thanked "friends, family, and pseudo-family" for showing up at the event. "God is the creator," she said, "and He inspires us in some ways to do the same." Much of her work, she remarked, emerges from travel photos. Irene Enns reminisced about her art career. At one time, she said, "I didn't know I could even draw a stick. One day I picked up a pencil and started doodling" – and a nascent talent was realized.

"Every one of these paintings," Enns continued, "has a story." The artwork of Enns and Vooys bears that out: each painting expresses, vividly and gently, a particular inner moment in space and time, a story in miniature.

having sought honour and power (*Ehre und Macht*).
* He recounts the rather controversial building of *Hospital Menonita Km 81*, noting the weak fiscal planning in the building process.
* Beginning on page 72, Siemens offers a very lengthy recap on how he perceived the mismanagement of colony finances, and excoriates Franz Dyck and an aide called Teresa, the then comptrollers.
* On page 85 is the text of his address to the residents of Neuland, in which he justifies his administration of colony affairs, followed a few pages later by a citation of the opposition he endured.
* On page 93 Siemens tells of his baptism by Harry Dyck and acceptance into the *Mennonitengemeinde* Concordia congregation, noting that in consequence of the Cheque Affair of 2004, he resigned his church membership.

In the final chapter, Siemens includes aphorisms reflecting his own life wisdom. (1) Winners never quit. (2) A mistruth is a powerful agent for destruction, which the media never tire of rehearsing. Then on page 106 he once again lists all the acknowledgments and recognitions that he earned during his public service, and, a few pages on, details of his retirement living. Strangely, throughout Peter Siemens says little about his own spiritual convictions or the entrenched faith practices his Mennonite community is so committed to. Notably, he does include, on the final page of the book, a German translation of the well-known poem "Footprints in the Sand" (Mary Fishback Powers, 1964), which with thematic consistency links to the title of the book – and may in fact be a barometer of his own inner uncertainties.

Photo for press release on page 29. Members of MHSC meeting in Quebec, January 17-18, 2020. Photo: MHSC

Press Release, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) met in Quebec on January 17 and 18 and discussed several new projects, including a history book of Mennonites in Canada since 1970 and a cross-Canada celebration of the centenary of the arrival of Russian Mennonites in 2023.

Building on MHSC's November 2018 history conference, "A People of Diversity: Mennonites in Canada Since 1970," the Society invited Brian Froese and Laureen Harder-Gissing to co-author a book on Mennonites in Canada from 1970-2020. Froese teaches history at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, and Harder-Gissing is archivist-librarian at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo.

Plans are proceeding for the *Russlaender* Centenary project. The main feature of the commemoration is a cross-Canada train trip in 2023, beginning in Quebec City with stops and events planned across the country. Participants can choose to be on all or any of the segments of the journey, or be involved when the travellers arrive in their part of the country.

MHSC also chose to recognize the migration of Mennonites from Canada to Mexico and Paraguay in 1922, the largest ever mass emigration from Canada. Events, exhibits and a conference are planned for 2022.

This year the MHSC award of excellence was presented to Lucille Marr in recognition of her contribution in research, writing and teaching about Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in Canada, her work on the executive of the MHSC and her role in the founding and ongoing work of the *Société d'histoire mennonite du Québec*.

The MHSC annual meeting in January 2020 was hosted by the *Société d'histoire mennonite du Québec* at Camp Peniel north of Montreal.

The new executive of MHSC includes: Laureen Harder-Gissing, president; Conrad Stoesz, vice-president; Jeremy Wiebe, treasurer; Barb Draper, secretary; and Bruce Guenther, member-at-large.

My Grandfather's Clocks

By Alvin Ens

Ninety years without slumbering (tick tock, tick tock),
His life's seconds numbering (tick tock, tick tock) …
(American folk song written by Henry Clay Work in 1876
and recorded by Johnny Cash)

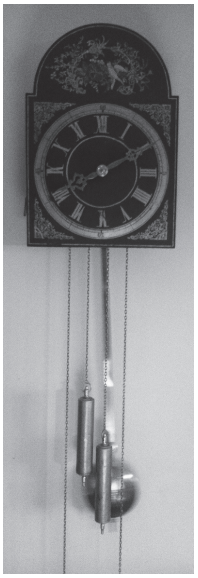
My grandfather, Cornelius A. Ens, was the village clock repairman. The Mennonite farming village of Edenburg, Saskatchewan, was begun by my great-grandfather Jacob Unrau in 1902 – before Saskatchewan even became a province in 1905. An immigrant from the steppes of Ukraine, Russia, Cornelius married into the village as a young man of 20 (he married Anna Unrau, daughter of Jacob).

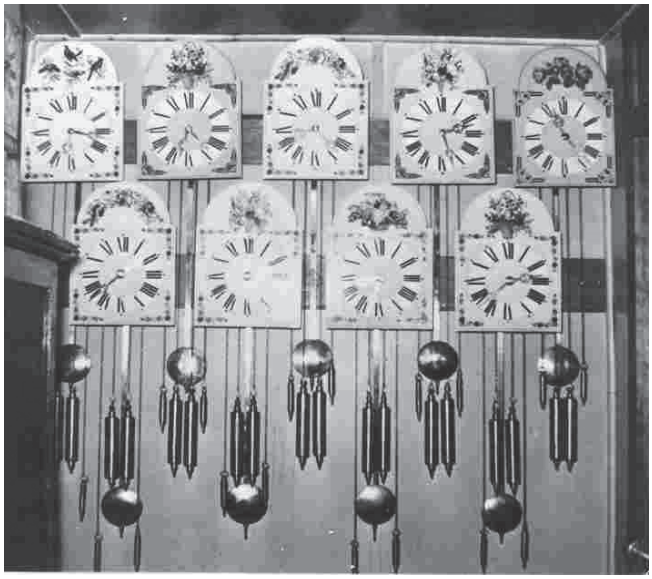
Story # 1

My grandfather loved entrepreneurship more than farming, brought in supplies from Hague, Rosthern and Saskatoon, and provided translation services to the largely German-speaking village. Soon, by 1918, he established the first store in Edenburg, and onto his house he added a shed which housed his clocks and clock repair equipment.

I watched in awe as my grandfather screwed the back off a pocket watch to reveal a hair-like spring oscillating its way to the tick tock of the watch. It was Grandpa's avocation turned vocation. When he became the general merchant of Edenburg, he also became the clock repairman. In the store and at home he had drawers of his tools: fine screwdrivers, chisel-like tools to pry with, files, etc. A customer might bring him a watch that wasn't working.

Another hobby of Grandfather C.A. Ens was the giving of watches to his grandchildren. I, Alvin, remember the ritual well. A





Left: The Warkentin Kroeger clock in 2018. Right: Kroeger clock replicas on the wall in Enns' studio. All photos courtesy of Alvin Enns

child must first convince him that he can tell time to be eligible for a pocket watch from his stock of Big Ben or Westclox watches.

I was given, or chose, a Big Ben watch which I have to this day. It has on its face "C.A. Ens, Edenburg," a fitting reminder of my grandfather. I must have received it in 1947 or so. I still have it on my shelf of memorabilia. Succeeding grandchildren got wristwatches as the times changed (Ens).

C. A. Ens. From a passport photo, 1952

Story # 2

My brother Dennis tells the following story. One day someone brought Grandpa a Kroeger clock. It took him a long time to repair it. Rumour has it that thereafter he started to make Kroeger clock replicas. Perhaps he took the clock apart piece by piece to get his pattern. I remember he made the clocks from scratch. The sprockets were sawed and filed by hand. The chain was made by shaping wire into links. The face was made and painted in his own workshop.

C.A. Ens is listed in GAMEO as one of two Kroeger-style clockmakers in North America (Krahn & Beck).

Story # 3

Whatever happened to those clocks?

Grandpa had nine or more clocks made, presumably one for each of his children, when his own clock stopped in 1960 and he was no more. I think everything he owned, including most of those clocks, was sold at public auction. Most clocks simply disappeared.

Before his father died, son John Ens bought a clock for $65.00. He told us, before he died in 2012, that it could still run that day but was too noisy so he kept it under the bed. His family has decreed that the clock shall stay with the John Ens family, and is now in the hands of daughter Ruth Jimmo. Ruth notes, "I remember sometimes watching Grandfather from the doorway into his work room. He had pieces of clocks and files and tools numbering in the hundreds. He never let us get too close because he didn't want us touching something and moving it. I know he made those clocks by hand…."

Dennis recalls that one at an auction sale in Aberdeen, Saskatchewan, in the early 1990s, went for an excess of $2500, more than he was willing to pay. In 1995, Dennis bought a clock for $1500 from Tony Funk, a Kroeger clock collector and researcher, from Hague, Saskatchewan. Dennis notes, "The clock continues to work very well and keeps time accurately. However, it is a little noisy and so we run it only on special occasions."

These two clocks are the only authentic C.A. Ens Kroeger-style clocks that we know of in existence in Ens hands. The watch repair equipment went for a pittance to son Isaac (Ens family).

Story #4

I married Irene Wiens, a granddaughter of Russian immigrants Abe and Helena Warkentin, who came to farm in Glenlea, Manitoba, in the 1920s. Eventually I was to learn that they too had a Kroeger clock; when they died the clock went to son Abe Warkentin. Some time, before he died, he took the clock apart, cleaned and oiled it; sister Mary repainted the face. It now hangs in his widow's living room and apparently keeps good time (Warkentin family).

Ninety years without slumbering (tick tock, tick tock),
His life's seconds numbering (tick tock, tick tock),
It stopped, short never to go again
When the old man died.

My grandfather died in 1960 at the age of 76. My mother, always a stickler for regular school attendance, records that I was permitted to miss school to attend his funeral in the Old Colony Mennonite church in Edenburg. Hopefully the memories of his clockmaking skills will outlive him for a long time.

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Warkentin family history.

Alvin Ens is a retired high school teacher. He writes poetry and family history. He is a member of Level Ground Mennonite Church.

Alvin's watch

Roots and Branches

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Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mennonite Heritage Museum and Mennonite Historical Society are closed until further notice. Staff remain at work and can be contacted by phone or email.

Lydia Isaak. Photo source: Abbotsford News.

We Bid Farewell to Lydia Isaak

The Mennonite Historical Society of BC has lost one of its longest-serving volunteers with the death of Lydia Isaak. She died April 27, 2020, nine days after suffering a heart attack.

Lydia, the youngest of eight children of Peter and Helena Martens, was born in Coaldale, Alberta on February 6, 1928. When she was fourteen, Lydia's family moved to Yarrow, BC, where she was baptized in the Yarrow MB Church. In Yarrow she also met John Isaak; the couple were married in 1954. The marriage ended tragically in 1987 when John died in a mountaineering accident on Mt. Cheam.

Two years later, Lydia moved to Abbotsford, where she lived a busy and independent-minded life. Lydia loved writing, and eventually completed a memoir in 2015. Bakerview MB was her home church.

Lydia Isaak was an engaging, and engaged, presence at the Historical Society. She enjoyed genealogical research, but had a sharp and curious mind for Mennonite history as well, contributing numerous documents now preserved in the Society archives. She was a memorable presence at the office, and we mourn her passing.

Dainty Bess. Watercolour by Marilyn Vooys

Abandoned. Watercolour by Irene Enns

Both paintings were exhibited in the *Mennonite Gals Can Paint* display at the Mennonite Heritage Museum, Abbotsford.