



Roots & Branches

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

PSALM 78

Editorial

■ By Robert Martens

This issue of *Roots and Branches* is something of a pot-pourri—guest writers telling stories of Mennonite forebears in the USSR, Romania, Germany; of the pioneer settlement of Yarrow; of traditions such as the annual pig slaughter; and more. Truth is, we are catching up on contributions from some wonderful British Columbian Mennonite writers. There's clearly a lot of storytelling talent in our BC Mennonite community.

The last bit of the issue focuses on the Netherlands. Many "ethnic" Mennonites in BC can trace their historical roots back to the Low Countries, and the evidence can be found in surnames such as Friesen (Friesland), or Dyck (dike). Despite internal conflict (should we be surprised?), the Mennonite church thrived in Holland during the time of Rembrandt. It was the so-called "Golden Age" of Anabaptist-Mennonites, when Holland was briefly a preeminent world power. Tolerance held the upper hand; Mennonites even produced a translation of the Qur'an.

Europe was also flexing its colonialist muscles, and tolerance had its limits. The Dutch were brutal colonizers in Indonesia, and that fact hasn't been forgotten by native Indonesians. In 2022, depending on the global pandemic, the Mennonite World Conference will be held in that country. It may not be widely known among Canadian Mennonites that an indigenous Mennonite church has flourished in Java, Indonesia's most populous island. That, despite the fact that the church there was established largely by Dutch missionaries.

"The only constant in life is change," wrote the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus. The Mennonite church, once a force in Dutch life, has dwindled to a remnant in the Lowlands. And Western Mennonites will have to get used to the fact that the bulk of the Anabaptist-Mennonite church has shifted to the Global South. The Indonesian Mennonite church bears witness to that.



Mountain Hillside 3

by Rebecca M. Jantzen. Watercolour & Pen, 2021. See more at <https://rebeccamjantzen.com/>

CONTENTS

Editorial	1
Heinz Klassen: A Visual Diary	2
Book Launch: <i>Dear Peter, Dear Ulla</i> by Barbara Nickel	2
Writer's Workshops 2022	3
Jacob (Loewen) Levin, 1903-2001	4
My Romanian Mennonite Family	7
My Father's Background Is Mennonite.	11
Pig Killing and Processing	12
Murder Mystery on the BC Electric Railway, 1915	14
The Powerhouse	17
A Few Moments in the Story of Dutch Mennonites.	18
Anabaptist-Mennonites and Islam	22
Review: <i>A Cloud of Witnesses</i> by John Roth	27
Tribute to Harold Ratzlaff	30
And Goodbye to Al Wall	30
The Yarrow Research Committee Publications	31
About the artist	32

Heinz Klassen: A Visual Diary

Gallery Exhibit Opening Reception, September 22, 2021

■ Reported by Robert Martens

After a long pandemic-imposed closure, the Mennonite Heritage Museum art gallery reopened with a retrospective of drawings by Fraser Valley artist Heinz Klassen (1948-2017). About thirty people attended the registration-only opening reception.

Lois Klassen, who was married to Heinz for some fifty years, briefly introduced the artwork. She pointed out that this exhibit of pen and ink/watercolour drawings on paper was previously mounted at The Reach Gallery Museum in Abbotsford. Once Heinz decided to begin drawing, said Lois, he never looked back: his commitment was total. Habitually, he carried with him his black shoulder bag, drawing paper, and sketch book, doing his artwork in churches, concerts, airports, but especially along the Vedder River. On a trip to New York, oblivious to the crush of the big city, Heinz took out his pen and ink and began sketching. “Can you draw and talk at the same time?” wondered Lois.

Lois related that Heinz, as a young man, had pondered the value to a Christian life of creating objects that were “not useful.” He came to realize that the pleasure inherent in artwork was a value in itself. His



From the Nashua, New Hampshire Series.

Drawing by Heinz Klassen

motivations changed as he aged. “Galleries mattered less and less the older he got,” said Lois. What mattered was the emotions involved, the fresh way of seeing. Heinz Klassen’s own words, included in the short biography at the exhibit, accentuate this: “I like the notion that drawings come closest to reflecting an artist’s creative involvement with his subject. Just follow the movement of the line across the page. It can be enthralling. Notice the line: now thick, dark, close together, weak, strong, continuous, broken, heavy sharp, dull, angular, smooth, rough, etc.”

BOOK LAUNCH

Barbara Nickel. *Dear Peter, Dear Ulla*. Saskatoon: Thistledown Press, 2021. 2 pm, November 6, 2021, Mennonite Heritage Museum

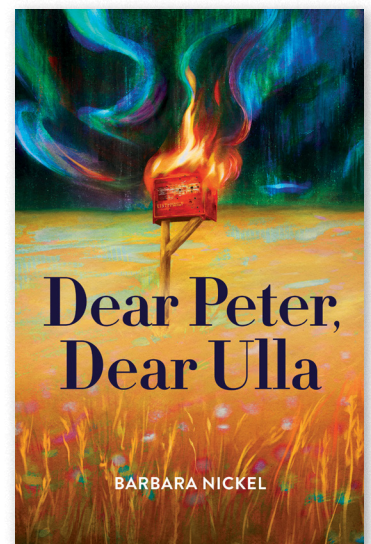
■ Reported by Robert Martens

“I’m excited that we can actually celebrate in person,” said author Barbara Nickel, and after countless online events—“Zoom” has become part of our common vocabulary—an in-person book launch was very welcome indeed for everyone there.

It was on a day of heavy intermittent rain that Barbara Nickel introduced her recently-published novel, *Dear Peter, Dear Ulla*, to a full house at the Mennonite Heritage Museum. The novel, said Nickel, was originally conceived for an adult readership, but over time transformed into a story for children. Nickel has written for

young people before, so this was not new territory for her.

In the novel, two twelve-year-olds correspond by mail as World War II is beginning. Peter lives in Saskatchewan, and Ulla, in Danzig (today Gdańsk, Poland). Although the plot is fictional, it is based on a real-life letter exchange between Nickel’s



mother, who as a young girl living in Saskatchewan was a pen pal with her cousin in Danzig. “The letters are the backbone of this book,” Nickel told her audience.

After reading a few excerpts—and Nickel is a compelling reader—the author responded to questions from the audience. How much do you research? she was asked. Often for months, said Nickel, though the amount of time spent researching is difficult to quantify. In the case of this novel, she acquired vital information on the defence of the Polish Post Office in Danzig—one of the



Barbara Nickel. Bevan Voth

first acts of World War II, and brutally suppressed by the Nazis—after her book was nearing completion. She rewrote it, and this “made the book so much better,” she said.

Barbara Nickel is a musician as well as a writer, and music played a large part in this book launch. A pianist played classics—Beethoven, Chopin—as attendees entered the Museum, and interjected a few musical phrases into the readings. Nickel said that she writes with music in mind. She likes to read aloud what she has written: “the sound of a sentence” is fundamental.

Writer’s Workshops 2022

February 26 *Keeping Our Stories Alive*

With facilitator Helen Rose Pauls. Helen will share a few skills and ways to delve into the stories of the past and bring them alive for the next generation. Come prepared to share a story or two and to record some new ideas. BIO: Helen Rose Pauls is a retired school teacher, a farm partner and a doting grandmother of thirteen.

March 26 *The Power of Story*

With facilitator Elsie K. Neufeld. What makes a life story powerful? Is the story of a housewife, a janitor, or a factory worker any less powerful than that of a renowned politician, clergyperson, or an academic achiever? Every life is a story, and written or told, in even the simplest language, holds power. In this workshop, we’ll look at how to write your life into a story that, regardless of how mundane it may seem, is an engaging and wonder-evoking disclosure of “This is my life. This is what I did. See what I did!” BIO: A published poet, essayist, and storyteller, Elsie K. Neufeld

She is a reader, speaker, Scrabble player, and an amateur Mennonite historian. With her husband Ernie, she has travelled the world and lately taken up e-biking and camping. Helen has written numerous magazine articles through the years and has published two books: *Refugee* and *Berry Flats*.

has been teaching writing courses and workshops since 1996 in various venues from Chilliwack to Vancouver. Throughout this time, she has also worked as a personal historian, adapting her services to her clients’ needs. These have included a merchant seaman; a Governor General Persons Case recipient; a retired lumber broker; a church organist; a grocery store manager; and from 2017-2020, Mott Electric, BC’s oldest family-owned electrical contracting company. Elsie recently moved back to Abbotsford, her birthplace, to be closer to family and friends.

April 30 *To Write or Not to Write; That is the Question?*

With facilitator Danny Unrau. The workshop will explore questions such as Who do you read? What do you read? What motivates your writing? When/where/how do you write? etc. etc. Let’s talk! BIO: Dan is a frequent convention speaker, guest preacher/speaker, workshop facilitator and professional storyteller. He loves to tell stories, be in and cause trouble in places he thinks need shaking up a little, arguing just for the fun

of it, and to be in other parts of the world, especially Manitoba, Europe & Israel and more lately, Africa, when not at home. He has authored 2 books of short vignettes about some of the weird and wonderful people he has encountered in life. His books include *You are the Boy; Saints, Sinners & Angels: Stories of People, Images of God; Rogues, Rascals and Rare Gems: Everyday People Looking for an Everyday God*.

Jacob (Loewen) Levin, 1903–2001

From: Abraham Jacob & Maria Loewen Family: A Journey Under God's Providence, by David F. Loewen, 2015.

■ By David F. Loewen

This story is the second of two parts. See the June 2021 issue for part 1. All photos provided by author.

The post-war years

The end of the war did not mark the end of Jacob's assignment to the Labour Army. Jacob writes that he was given permission to go home to Samarkand for a month in 1946. His arrival at home was both unexpected and hard on Lyuba. The family had moved to smaller quarters, and she was having difficulty meeting everyday needs with her office job, working for a chemist.

Jacob was offered employment with the MVD (successor to the NKVD) in building maintenance, but only if he were given his release from the Labour Army. This was refused. In Jacob's words, "My situation was worse than before."

There was no doubt in Jacob's mind of the importance of the work in which he had been involved. He resolved to appeal to the head of the MVD, Lavrentiy Beria, and if that failed, to apply directly to Stalin to permit him to return to Samarkand to resume his work.

That was early in 1947; on August 12 of that year, he was summoned by phone to appear at head office within fifteen minutes. His superior asked Jacob if he

had applied to the highest offices in the land, to which he replied in the affirmative. He then demanded that Jacob sign a release form and presented him with an order from the MVD to proceed to Samarkand. When he asked for his permit to leave the area—which was a formal requirement—he was informed he didn't need one. This fact alone convinced Jacob that there was no doubt any longer that he was trusted. His superiors received a strong reprimand from Stalin for not giving more credence to Jacob's request.

"Freedom"

Jacob's perspective on those lost years: "Now I was free. I could hardly believe it. I tried to get away before they could change their minds. Miraculously and with great effort I went home. Thinking about my life in the Workers' Army, it had not been too bad. It was a good move to get away from the stone quarry. I would not have survived in that place. As bread cutter, I had kept my physique in a normal shape. In my research work with the engineers, it had been good, and the field work in search of water gave me a lot of experience in this field. I relied on this experience when I lectured in the university on the practical applications of geological search. I lost five years of my life, but compared with other citizens, who lost their lives, their loved ones, and all material belongings during the war, I was lucky. I am alive, and my family is intact. The economic loss is of no consequence and did not matter much."

Jacob soon obtained a position as lecturer in the geology department at Samarkand, but only after he assured the university president that Lyuba would be more discreet about public comments. The nature of her comments is not given—only that she almost prevented Jacob from acquiring that post.



Jacob Levin, 1955.



Jacob on a solo expedition into the mountains doing geological research (1948)

Notwithstanding Jacob's stature at the university, as an ethnic German he was under constant surveillance by the MVD, and was required to keep them informed of any movement away from the city. His mail was censored. Enclosed in a letter from his father, however, was a note from the censor, and Jacob was finally made aware of the answer to an old family mystery. The censor in question introduced himself as a former close friend of Jacob's older brother Johann. He revealed, for the first time, that Johann had died of typhus in Sochi. Finally, there was closure for the family regarding Johann's disappearance and death, approximately twenty-five years after the fact.

After Stalin's death, life for Jacob normalized. The MVD informed him that he was trusted fully. He was the object of no political opposition. During the 1960s, the geology faculty closed, and Jacob became dean of the Faculty of History and Geography. In 1950, authorities allowed Jacob to start building his own home. On their lot, Jacob and Lyuba had apples, cherries, peaches, and a few varieties of grapes, providing all the fruit they needed. Jacob's wages allowed Lyuba to quit her job, allowing her to focus on homemaking.



The Levin family, 1950: Ernst, Lyuba, Ella, and Jacob.

Changes introduced by the Uzbekistani government in 1955 brought new challenges. These changes meant that Jacob and Lyuba moved to Tashkent, leaving their children with their parents in Samarkand to finish school. Houses were expensive, so they moved into a one-room student apartment where they stayed one year before returning to Samarkand. Fortunately, Jacob was offered a position at the university as an academic advisor in the Faculty of Geology.

Retirement

Jacob became dean of geography and history in 1961, a position he retained until 1963, when university rules required that he retire. Jacob describes the recognition afforded him: "I don't wish to praise myself, but they really showed me their gratitude. In 1963 I turned 60 years of age. The university recognized this event and I received many congratulations from the students, the teachers, the Geology Department, and from the government of Uzbekistan. It was a real privilege that many of my former students who were geologists attended, and my cousin, Driediger (Daniel), from Syktyvkar [in northwestern Russia] was also present. In the evening, a great banquet was held in the university dining hall in my honour. The meeting with friends was very pleasant and everyone had a great time."

Jacob described his retirement as "a peaceful life without any administrative unpleasantness." Both married children lived in or near Moscow, so after much deliberation, Jacob and Lyuba decided to uproot themselves and move. Ernst loved Moscow, and Ella had moved to Kaluga (150 kilometres southwest of Moscow) with her family. In the summer of 1974, they received a letter that a nice home was for sale for 14,000 rubles in Kaluga. They sold their home in Samarkand and moved to Kaluga.

The move to Kaluga was a shock to Jacob. He had continued working till age seventy-two. He was abruptly without anything to do: "Suddenly, I was free. I never had to hurry anywhere to work. I had to sit at home the whole day. It was hard to get used to, but the garden rescued me. There was work in abundance. Life again went at a full pace. Ella and her family lived close by, and Ernst's family was not far away. We often visited them."

Lyuba's health was not good; she had already experienced several heart attacks in Samarkand.

At age ninety, she experienced a severe attack, but lived to celebrate their sixtieth anniversary.

Jacob writes, "Finally, our anniversary day arrived which we celebrated with our families on the 25th of May 1994. Lyuba was in bed most of the day (25th), but in the evening, she was on her feet because she wanted to celebrate. We made cocoa and peacefully remembered the past. At night I was awakened by a loud moan. She complained about severe head pains.

Since this was not the first time, I was not disturbed very much. In the morning I called our doctor who usually visited his patients in the afternoon. At 1 pm, I noticed that her condition had worsened. We called emergency, but they could not be there at once since their machine was on the road. It was clear that the end was

near. I called Ella from her work. She arrived several minutes before her [mother's] death. Soon emergency was also there, and the doctor, who could only say that she was dead. My partner was dead. I had shared 62 years of my life with her. We had celebrated our silver, golden, and diamond anniversaries. We had a good (ignoring the bad) and happy life. As time went on, the loss of my life's partner became more difficult. Soon after the burial, I left our home and moved into an apartment. Here I live with my granddaughter, Tania. We live in harmony, but I miss my partner!"

On 25 December 2001, Jacob died suddenly. His death had come twenty days before his 99th birthday. He had been spry and active until his last day, and on the morning of the day he died, he had boasted to his son about his strong health. He told Ernst that his health was the result of daily exercise, and that his goal was to outlive his father, Abraham, who had lived to an age just short of 103 years.

Ella died one week later, on January 2, of cancer. Her family and Ernst and his family continue to live in, or near, Moscow.

"We were happy together"

Jacob writes, "Looking into the past of my life, I must admit it was good. I entered the world just at the right time. Four years earlier or later and I would not have been able to leave the village. The Revolution came during my youth and I had a plan to get away from the role of a farmer. I wanted to see the world. This brought us into the village library. The Revolution also brought two sisters into our village—Helen and Maria Petrovna Potyemkin. The relationship with them opened a new



Jacob and Lyuba on their Golden Wedding anniversary, 1982.

world to me and brought wings into my thinking. In the fall of 1922 I left my village and stepped into a strange city.

"My national surrounding changed. As a German I found myself among Russians. This would not have been possible if I had been born earlier or later. I experienced luck in Samara. As a boy from the vil-

lage—19 years old—I had never seen a theatre nor been in one. I found myself in a theatre group. I saw the staging. What particularly interested me was the life of the tsars. All of this had a great influence on my future life. The second year in the Samara Technicum I became accustomed to this social life. I became acquainted with the work and emerged as the leader of the student collective. I came into conflict with the administration while dealing with the grants for students and demanding permission for students to be present when issues involving students were discussed. I seemed to like this. It was my job. This led to my being recommended by the teaching staff for entrance into the BUZ University [meaning of BUZ unknown]. But there was opposition and the manager advised me to stay with the Technicum as manager of the student boarding home.

"Another important event in Samara was the arrival, on the day of my departure, of my workplace assignment. If this had arrived one day later, I would not have got it and my life would have gone in another direction. My love for social interaction with others urged me to enter the history faculty and I saw myself as a future lecturer in history. But again, fate interrupted. In a year, the faculty would be closed. Again, I had to decide. If I intended to be a historian, I would have to move to another city. But I changed my profession to science, the natural science department. Again, I succeeded. I met Professor Smirnov, geologist, and became a student of the geology faculty. Joining the faculty, I soon became the right-hand man of

the professor. As a student of the older courses, I became the practical leader in geology for the younger students. Since I was a student, I fulfilled the work of an assistant. Is that not luck?

"After finishing this Institute, I was offered a position as assistant in Samarkand by the professor. I moved to Samarkand in October 1, 1928. From the student bench I had come into the teaching staff of the university. Since I became an assistant, I was forced to find my way in science. Again, I was fortunate. In Agalyke they had found Iceland spar, which became my success. Unexpectedly, I found Iceland spar; I left with it for the Mineral Academy in Moscow; unexpectedly, I met Cherbakov who opened for me a new path in science. I became the geologist for the Tadzhiko-Pamirskoy Expedition—the only specialist in Iceland spar. In the country I received boundless support for research in this area. There was a great need for this raw material. At this point I became an independent educated worker of the university, responsible for my own financial support. I think this saved me from being arrested.

"During this time when they arrested most of the Germans, I was the only one of the Germans I knew who was still free. It didn't matter how they worked at the beginning of the war. They sent people from the city to Kishlak, conscripted for the Workers' Army, and many were sent to other places. I was fortunate that my whole family came through this unscathed. Not many

in the USSR could say this about their fate. My family was also fortunate. Lyuba was a true partner in my life. We celebrated together as I stated earlier. Our relationship with our children and grandchildren was good. We loved and respected one another. We were happy together."

Author's reflections

Through all the years, whenever we thought of our Uncle Jacob in the Soviet Union, we only focused on the tragedy of a son who had become trapped behind the Iron Curtain, never to be reunited with his parents. We lacked the full picture of his life and, particularly, the family he had nurtured and loved, along with the challenges he faced. I, at least, had not considered that Jacob might have lived a fulfilling life. The opposite appears to have been the case; it is quite clear that of all the Loewen siblings, Jacob lived the most interestingly diverse life of them all; his whole life appeared to be an adventure. It certainly was not an easy life, but Jacob had successfully navigated his way through a maze of challenges that most others might very well have failed at.*

Ernst Leven, son of Jacob, is an honorary member of the International Subcommittee on the Permian system, the author and co-author of over 200 scientific publications, including several books. In 1968, he joined the Department of Regional Geology of the Moscow Institute of Geological Exploration, where he served as researcher and post-doctoral (1975) professor in the department. Since 1991 he has been working at the Geological Institute of Russian Academy of Sciences as chief researcher.

My Romanian Mennonite Family

■ By Isaak Boleac, translated by Irene Plett (*all photos provided by author*)

Isaak Boleac (1927-2007) was one of my father's three dear cousins, who were our only close relatives in Vancouver when I grew up. He left a genealogical treasure recently discovered by his daughter Esther Wolff. Isaak tells the story of an outsider being embraced by Russian Mennonites, then enduring through much upheaval.

I translated Isaak's letter with help from the DeepL translation website. Minor errors in the neatly handwritten text were corrected. For clarity, I added headings, bullets,

and paragraph breaks. Explanatory information not in the original text is shown in square brackets.

Isaak's father, Dimitri Boleac (aka Dumitru Boleacu, Johann Boljak), arrived in Russia as a Romanian soldier. After being captured in World War I, he was welcomed by the Mennonites of Friedensfeld, Sagradovka, where he became a strong believer and witness for Christ. He worked as a cooper (barrel-maker) and had a large family after marrying my dad's aunt Agathe Graewe. But Dimitri

* Both my father and his brother visited Jacob on two separate occasions (1967, 1986), and three family members managed to visit Canada—Ella (1988), Jacob (1989), and Ernst (1992).

noticed the increasing danger in Russia and received permission for the family to leave the country, thus avoiding the fate of many young men of the settlement who were taken away by the Russians.

It wouldn't be the last time that the family had to move.
Irene Plett

August 8, 1990

Isaak (Fritz) Boleac
2745-164th St., Surrey, BC
V4B 4Z5 Canada

I'd like to try to put together something of a life story of our parents. It would be easier if my two sisters were here; unfortunately, Anna and Tina are still in Romania.

[My brother] Hans (Johann), who volunteered for the air force in 1942 when we lived at 17 Wagnergasse in Jena, Thuringia, was separated from his parents because of enemy action.

I was also separated from our family after I was drafted in February 1944. The questions which we cannot answer or specify, and which were important to the immigration authorities, were certainly satisfactorily answered by our parents at the naturalization office in Mährisch-Kromau [now Moravský Krumlov, Czech Republic] on July 21, 1941.

Unfortunately, we (mother and children) did not meet our grandparents (on Father's side). We do not even have our grandfather's date of birth. His name was Ivan (Johann) Boleac(u). Because he was unfortunately a slave of alcohol, he could not look after the family. Therefore, he did not live long. Our good grandmother, Katherina Boleac(u), born in? [question mark in original] Fälticeni, Suceava District, Romania, had a very hard life.

Children:

- Constantin was the oldest son.
- Vasile, the second, and
- then twins followed. Our father, Dimitri (Dietrich) Boleac, was born on Feb. 18, 1896, in Fälticeni, Suceava District, Romania. Died on Jan. 15, 1975 in Cuvin, Banat [now Kovin, South Banat District, Vojvodina, Serbia].

Grandmother was forced to give Dimitri away, but because his twin sister died, she quickly took him back. Due to great poverty, Father had only little schooling and was dependent on himself from very early on. He learned the craft of barrel-making (cooper).

He came to Russia through enemy action in the First World War. He worked with the German Mennonites, who were called to Russia by the Empress Katherina. With them he came to the greatest experience of his whole life. From ecclesiastical Orthodoxy, he became a living, believing Christian.

His first wife (née Richards) died without children.

In 1924, he married Agathe Graewe, born on April 6, 1904, in Friedensfeld, Ukraine, Russia (the German colony of Sagradovka). Agathe's parents were

- Father: Isaak Graewe, born on Dec. 19, 1866, in Kleefeld, Molotschna, Ukraine, Russia. Died on Feb. 28, 1933 in Friedensfeld, Ukraine, Russia.
- Mother: Anna Thiessen, born on May 7, 1873. Died on Oct. 20, 1929, in Friedensfeld, Ukraine, Russia.

[My brother] Johann (Hans) was born on March 29, 1925 in Friedensfeld, Ukraine. On May 28, 1927, Isaak [I] was born in Friedensfeld, Ukraine, Russia.

In 1928, Father and his family migrated to South



Dimitri and Agathe with children Johann, Isaak, Anna and Tina, ca. 1934, Friedensfeld, Sagradovka.

Siberia at the Amur River, in the hope of improving our lives. On July 6, 1929, Anna was born in Schoensee, Siberia, Russia [Savitaya, Amur settlement]. Father worked in a fishery that was very far away from the family. We lived very modestly.

Father decided (probably in 1930) to return to Friedensfeld, Ukraine. Many were dispossessed, including grandfather Graewe. The poverty was great. We lived in a little house with a mud roof. Father was the cooper of this area. He fabricated many wooden containers and barrels.

On Nov. 11, 1931, Tina (Ekaterina) was born in Friedensfeld. Now Father was moved with the idea of moving to Romania. The communist government caused him a lot of difficulties. They were not well-disposed towards the German Mennonites. Because Father had Romanian citizenship, they could

not keep him, but they did not want to let his wife and children leave with him.

After we buried our Lydia, who was the latest to be born, we managed to cross the border after many difficulties. As Aunt Katherine [Graewe] Derksen told me in 1989, it was January 1935 when we arrived in Romania.

The girl who was then born in Romania did not stay alive for long. Our place of residence was now Iași, the capital of Moldova. Father had a Jewish employer in his occupation. It was soon better for us now. Father found a German Protestant school and church. Anna and I (Isaak) were accepted. Mother disliked the Romanian language. On Aug. 18, 1938, Daniel was born in Iași, Moldova.

After that we moved to Dobruja by the Black Sea. Mother liked it much better; only a few people were not German in the village of Mamuslia [Căscioarele], Constanța County. Father borrowed money and started his own business. Soon we were debt-free. We were much better off. Father's brother was also employed in the workshop. Many barrels had to be made.

Then came the resettlement of all Germans. Father welcomed it, because he liked to travel. We went via Belgrade to Mährisch-Kromau, Znaim/Niederdonau district [now Moravský Krumlov, Czech Republic]. We now landed in the resettlement camp. Willie, who was also born in Romania, died in 1940.

July 21, 1941 was an important day for our family. We became [German] citizens.

Wilhelm, who had already been "on the way," was born here on Oct. 14, 1941, two months and 23 days after our naturalization, in Mährisch-Kromau, Znaim/Niederdonau District. Lieselotte was born on May 27, 1943, in Jena, Thuringia. Peter was born on Nov. 16, 1947, in Covăsânț, Banat, after the forced deportation to Romania.

The naturalization was confirmed on Dec. 20, 1984, by the regulatory office of the state capital, Hanover.

This letter is in my possession. After naturalization, many young men were drafted into the Wehrmacht.

Father worked in a jam factory. We had few worries. Hans was temporarily in the countryside. From Mährisch-Kromau, our family went briefly through the transit camp at Bad Blankenburg, then to Jena, Thuringia. It became our home in 1941. We got the little house at 17 Wagnergasse.

Father worked at the cooperage, then at the Saale train station. Hans worked at the Glaswerk Schott u. Genossen glass factory and enjoyed it. He soon volunteered to join the airmen.

Surprised by an air raid

On May 27, 1943, the youngest daughter, Lieselotte, was born in Jena. On that very day, we were surprised by an air raid. Our house was also damaged. Hans (Johann) had a short vacation.

Hans Plett, the oldest son of mother's sister Anna, surprised us enormously as a German soldier. Father hadn't recognized him.

In February 1944, I (Isaak) was drafted. I was just in the middle of my apprenticeship as a cooper.

After brief R.A.D. [Reichsarbeitsdienst] and anti-aircraft training, we went to Berlin. My parents visited me briefly in Halle-Leuna in spring 1944. Twenty years would have to pass before I could see them again.

Father was buried alive in the air raid on Jena, but, thank God, he got away with only

a light head wound. Father was supposed to join the *Volkssturm* (emergency army), but was then spared from that.

The end of the war was approaching. The Americans occupied Jena; however, they withdrew again and let in the Russians. It was 1945. Unfortunately, there was no more opportunity to escape.

With little luggage, our family was sent to Romania, completely against their will. When they arrived, they had neither board nor lodging. They were considered



Dimitri and Agathe with children (in birth order): Anna, Tina, Daniel, Will, Lieselotte, and Peter, ca. 1950, Banat, Romania

followers of Hitler. They were in a very difficult situation.

They also didn't know whether their two sons who were in the Wehrmacht were still alive. Johann fell into Russian captivity in Austria. After 4 ½ years, he managed to come to Isaak in Hannover. It was a big surprise for me. Our parents, who had prayed for us a lot, thanked God again and again for our preservation.

Isaak, who at the end belonged to the Theodor Koerner division, fell into brief captivity in the west. This was at the beginning of May 1945. We prisoners were all distributed among the farms in the Braunschweig government district. We were released from the army in December (Wolfenbüttel).

Until the end of March [1948], I worked as a farm-hand in Schlewecke, Badenstein and Mahlum, in the Gandersheim District; until the end of January 1949, in Bockenem am Harz as a cooper apprentice; then until autumn 1952 at the Kaiser-Brauerei Brewery in Hannover-Ricklingen. The address was 10a Oberstraße.

Family reunions

Our parents and siblings in Romania had to be helped repeatedly. It seemed to us in Canada that Father demanded too much. Also, our beginning was not easy. They asked over and over for everything to be done to bring about a reunion in the West. They were dispatched with promises again and again. Applications and entry papers had to be paid for repeatedly.

Johann went to Gronau-Westfalen, married there and migrated to Canada in 1950. Isaak followed at the end of 1952 and first stayed with Johann, who already lived in Vancouver, British Columbia. The beginning in Canada was not easy, but it was worth it to persevere.

In Feb. 1952, we tried to achieve a family reunion through the Bavarian Red Cross. Unfortunately, it remained unsuccessful. Of the 20 descendants of Johann, our parents only



Isaak and his future wife Hilda Balkon, ca. 1953, Vancouver, B.C.

saw Dieter, the oldest son, who visited them when they were still living. Daniel, the son of Isaak, only found his grandparents' grave in Cuvin in 1989.

Isaak's first visit was in 1965. He saw 18-year-old Peter for the first time. The second visit was in the summer of 1974. Half a year later, Father died on January 15, 1975

(photograph date). Mother was weak. She lived until 1981; Tina looked after her faithfully.

When Johann was in Russian captivity, he didn't disclose that he had parents in Romania. Therefore, he couldn't visit them immediately on the way after he was released in 1950. He didn't want to risk it. In East Germany, they tried to persuade him to stay, but his goal remained firm. He wanted to go to Hanover to see Isaak.

Only after 23 years did he [Johann] see our parents and siblings again. In 1973, he visited them for the second time. In Germany, he could visit Aunt Neta, Mother's oldest sister; Aunt Maria Graewe; Johann Friesen [Neta's son]; Peter Plett in Hochheim [am Main]; and other relatives. August 1990 was the third time that he was in Europe for a visit.

[Now in Romania:] Anna is in Iași, married to Michael [Mihai] Acatrinei. They have 6 children. Tina is in Arad, married to Abraham [Avram] Popescu. Daniel is also married in Arad, Banat, and has a daughter.

Wilhelm is now in Neuwied [in Germany]. We are hopeful that he will reside there. Our cousin Anna

Thiessen is very committed to him.... Aunt Margarete Buhler in Neuwied and Aunt Katherina Derksen, Mother's sisters, are glad to have seen him. Willie now has the opportunity to visit and get to know all the relatives in Germany. Those in Canada of course also wish to see him. In 1984, he was not able to come to visit.

[Also in Romania:] Lieselotte is married to Konstantin Nistor in Arad. Daughter Camelia [-Manuela] is currently still



Dimitri, 1969, Romania

studying medicine. Peter and Ana Boleac are in Arad and have four children. It looks very poor for them.

In the summer of 1989, [my son] Daniel and I were able to see and speak to all the loved ones that I am writing about here—also Jakob Plett in Schwäbisch Gmünd, with all his loved ones. He is the son of Mother's sister Anna. [My cousins] Peter Plett and Heinrich (Isaak) Graewe are here with us in Canada. When my son Daniel became somewhat ill in Romania, I told Tina that we had to go to Jakob Plett as soon as possible. We arrived at midnight.

We could visit Maria, the daughter of Uncle Isaak Graewe, in Espelkamp. We only found the grave of our parents, but near Cologne and Saarburg we found Aunt

Katharine [Graewe] Derksen and Aunt Gretel [Graewe] Buhler with relatives. It was a special joy. It is a pity that not all relatives from Canada were there.

In the last few days, I have read many old letters from my parents. At the end they sometimes write: "If we do not see each other again on earth, we will see each other in the eternal home." May this wish of my parents prove true not only for our relatives, but also for all those who want to join us.

Translator: Irene Plett is a writer living in South Surrey, BC. More of Isaak's story and a link to the original German transcription are posted on her blog at <https://ireneplett.weebly.com/blog/isaaks-story>.

My Father's Background Is Mennonite

Written by Brenda Froese about her father, Victor Froese, as part of a Winnipeg high school report c. 1980, and presented verbatim. All photos provided by the author.

My father's background is Mennonite. His family originated in the Netherlands. They went to Russia around the 1780s. In 1939, World War II began and the Russians began terrorizing the Mennonites because they spoke German. My father, Victor Froese, was born in Neuendorf, Ukraine, in 1940.

His family tried to leave Russia in 1941. They travelled in a wagon train. My grandparents' wagon did not get across the border, but the one in which my father and his older brother Franz were in with their aunts, got through.

My grandparents were forced to remain in Russia and Dad hasn't seen them since. Dad's mother died and his father writes to my great-grandmother once in a while. Her letters are the only ones that get through.

After leaving Russia, my father went to Germany. He lived in Buxtehude from 1941 to 1949 and attended school there for a year or two.

My father came to Canada in 1949. This was possible because of the MCC. They had lists of refugees in Germany who wanted to come to Canada, and the people [Mennonites] who are already established in Canada could sponsor a person or family.

Mr. H. Hildebrandt of Abbotsford, BC, sponsored my dad, my Uncle Frank (he anglicized his name), and their aunt, Gertrude Harder. They came by boat to Halifax, and took the train to the west coast. They

lived with the Hildebrandts for a year. After this they rented a berry farm near Yarrow for another four years or so.

After giving up the berry farm, they moved into Yarrow and lived with Tante

Trud [their aunt]. She worked at a cannery which was across the road from where they lived. It burned down twice while they lived there. [Actually, there were two canneries.]

Because the area around Yarrow and Abbotsford is predominantly Mennonite, it is possible for the people there to retain much of their culture. They still speak German in their homes and there are some who can't speak English, although most can understand it. My great-grandmother speaks only German and a little Russian. She wears homemade clothes and most of what she eats is produced on the farm. The farm, which is owned by my dad's uncle Henry Froese, consists of a small house, a summer kitchen, and two barns.

They own two or three cows at a time, a few chickens, and they have raspberries and strawberries. They sell



My dad and Uncle Frank in a raspberry field (1951)

milk and eggs to the neighbours and the berries go to the cannery or store, depending on the quality. They still use a hand-operated separator and make their own butter, and drive a 1978 Dodge Omni. They recently bought their first TV—a 12" black and white one, and an organ. It's a very strange mixture of old and new.

When my father and my uncle emigrated, however, they went to school where the majority of the kids were native and spoke only English. They were picked on because they spoke German; therefore, they quickly learned English, and without any accent.

The Mennonites around Yarrow don't really have a dress code, so they wore the same clothes as everybody else. They did retain their religion, of course, because everyone else was Mennonite, too. (My dad changed to the Baptist religion after marrying my mother because that is her denomination.)

My father graduated from Chilliwack High School in 1959 and went into education. He got his B.Ed. from UBC, his M.Ed. from Western Washington State College, and he taught at Yarrow Elementary and Chadsey Elementary for a few years. In 1969 he received an offer of a job at the University of Manitoba which he accepted. He now has a Ph.D. (University of Minnesota) and a full professorship at the U of M.



Vic in 1962 with his Grade 6 class - his first teaching job in Yarrow.

Victor Froese: I am a third-generation teacher (my parents and grandfather were teachers in the Ukraine) and my story does not end with this article. In 1986 I returned to BC as Head of the Language Education Department at UBC. After retirement in 1999 my wife and I moved to our property in the Yarrow area. I was subsequently elected to the Chilliwack, District #33, School Board for two terms. More recently I have taught a Creative Digital Photography course at the University of the Fraser Valley, in their Elder College program. I am also currently a board member of the Yarrow Volunteer Society and the Yarrow Ratepayers Association.

Brenda Froese lives with her partner, their son and two badly behaved Labrador Retrievers in the heritage neighbourhood of Wolseley in Winnipeg, MB. Transplanted from BC to Manitoba as a child, Brenda grew up in Winnipeg and attended the University of Manitoba prior to her employment with a major electrical utility company. She considers herself a "marginal Mennonite" and enjoys learning about her family history and cultural traditions. She occasionally has a hankering for Oma's rollkuchen, and has been known to bake quantities of paska at Easter!

Pig Killing and Processing

■ By Vic Janzen

There is a word for the fine tradition of Mennonites killing and processing pigs. I remember it in Plautdietsch as *Schwienschlachten* but have no idea on how to write the language so rely on English phonetics. The Germans say *Schweinfest*. Pig-killing day at Grandpa Janzen's farm remains a vivid and treasured memory for me.

Grandpa would raise seven pigs. One for him and Grandma, and one for each member of the family. The clans would gather at dawn on a Saturday when it was deemed the hogs were ready to be slaughtered. So, all six families, including all the children, would arrive and get to work. My Uncle Henry Friesen would shoot the pigs and Grandpa would bleed them with a two-edged dagger he had made from an old bastard file. I eventually inherited this dagger, along with a large butcher knife

and cleaver made of Solingen steel. I use these tools to this day.

Once the pigs were nicely bled, they were delivered to a wooden pig-sized trough where they were scalded with boiling water, and the children were recruited to shave off the hair with sharp knives. As the eldest child at age ten, I was put in charge of this operation. The heads would be severed from the carcass and taken into the kitchen where the clan women were prepared to make such delicacies as liverwurst and head cheese.

The shaven and headless carcasses, meanwhile, were hung from the rafters of the butchering shed where the uncles would set about butchering them into useable segments such as roasts, ground meat or hamburger. Much of the ground meat would be used to make the traditional Mennonite farmer's sausage, or *Rieekjaworscht*. After the women in the farmhouse kitchen had cleaned the entrails that had been delivered to them, these casings were returned to the shop where a couple of old geezers from the neighbourhood, veterans of sausage-making dating back to the tsarist time in Russia, would form the sausages, receiving some to take home at the end of the day, as well as enjoying the pork-based evening meal. The raw meat was basically spiced with salt and pepper and kneaded to a tight constituency before being fed into the hand-cranked *Fleischmaschine* with the sausage horn at the end.

The sausages would be taken out to the well-seasoned hardwood smokehouse where they would be cold-smoked at sixty degrees Fahrenheit for six hours and then left overnight in the autumn weather to cool before being distributed to the families to take home.

The fat of the animals was cut up and fed through a grinder with large holes under the knives and dumped into the *Miagropen* (large cauldron) cemented into brickwork in a small building near the kitchen. The brickwork had a slow fire underneath this huge cast-iron rendering pot. The fat would

slowly melt into lard while a young person stirred it with a wooden paddle to keep connective tissue from adhering to the sides of the *Miagropen*. Again, as the eldest grandchild, this job initially fell to me, relieving my Aunt Helen, a teenager at the time, to work more romantic bits of the day's procedures.

The best part of this lard-making process was the residue of *Jreewen* (cracklings) that remained at the bottom of the pot once the lard had been strained off. This mixture of ground-up connective tissue and lard would be added to fried potatoes for wonderful breakfast provender. Also, while this rendering was taking place, the ribs of the animals, with pork chop attached, would be dumped into the *Miagropen* and cooked. While all was hot, these *Rebspäa* (spare ribs) would be put in sealers and canned with the hot fat. Then, throughout the winter, these would be eaten with a bit of salt and pepper. Cold.

The work over, the women would provide a glorious feast of vegetables, potatoes, gravy, and pork meatballs called *Cotletten*. Given the meat was super fresh, not having had time to age, some cases of diarrhea set in.

Many years later, when I had a farm in Columbia Valley, and while Uncle Henry Friesen and my parents were still alive, I purchased some pigs from a neighbour and we replicated much of this experience with my children and the children of my brother Gerry, as well as a few friends.



Pig butchering.

Drawing by Arnold Dyck for his book *Verloren in der Steppe*, part III

Murder Mystery on the BC Electric Railway, 1915

■ By Larry Nightingale

Once he'd been a champion. He'd heard the roar and cheer as he broke through the finish-line ribbon, no doubt to be hoisted high by family and friends. He'd won the Boston City Bicycle Race of 1904. Perhaps the engraved silver-plated trophy still stood proud and polished on the grand mantel of his new Canadian residence 3,000-plus miles away. He'd brought with him here to his new station in life his wife and their two young sons—one still but a babe in arms. Arriving from Massachusetts by train in 1906 to take up skilled employment as chief engineer with the then fledgling British Columbia Electric Railway Company. Far cross-continent, just north of the border here in the Pacific Northwest. By all accounts, life had been good. And things had continued to go well. Yet then, not a full decade on, this reportedly well thought of, mild-tempered man's glazed-over eyes stared up blindly from his bed, his lifeless body found stripped bare and pallid in that summer evening's twilight hour, with smoke billowing from out the tall broad powerhouse station's upstairs window.

The wonderful roar of life around his ears was now faded. His good wife's lovely laughter and their tousle-haired sons' carefree adolescent yells and whistles were now not even as the faintest thin tinkles from the nearby mountain stream, and the slow thunder of the last train passing was as but one last violent shudder without sound. He never heard the calamitous end of his own sweet life's story. The last sentence's punctuation was a bullet. Sudden and abrupt. Chief Engineer Jesse Smith Magoon, lying with a fatal lead slug through his forehead. Dead-still on the bed in a room overlooking the lakeshore railroad where on such a summer evening he might have been off on a late wander up the creek, lungs full of fresh air, grinning, and swatting his way through tall ferns and blooming bramble and then down from that wooded slope of Vedder Mountain, to take his good night's rest. So as to again ably tend to all tasks at hand come morning. Duties for just another fine day employed with the BCER. This the company for which he'd worked since rail extension to the outlying area the same year of his arrival, supposedly in regards to the various necessary construction projects,

for example, this new substation for that eventual Fraser Valley Line.

Out past Majuba Hill's most westerly reach, here at what's officially known as the BCER's Sumas Substation, halfway between the valley's upstart lumber townsites of Abbotsford and Chilliwack, some five years after the Interurban cargo and passenger service had extended there, June 12, 1915, had seemingly unfolded as just another day of that eternal summer, and all things considered, I suppose it was good to be alive if indeed you were.

I'm standing here now more than a century on. The well-known local old powerhouse remains—the tall grey concrete edifice, tucked in where's now the tiny modern-day hamlet of Arnold just a shout away. The one-time powerhouse a private dwelling, no longer housing railroad personnel. Today all the active stations of the BC Electric are gone. Freight still runs but the valley line's passenger service ended here by 1950, a small handful of years before I was born and raised nearby. My hometown Yarrow was built by newly immigrant Mennonites on virgin lake-bottom land after the provincial government's great reclamation project of the 1920s drained the vast lake via an ambitious network of dykes and canals.

To fit the facts of this rough-stitched bloodstained tapestry of local history, mystery and murder, I've assembled notes mined from articles digitally archived and freely available now, as in the yellowed old dailies of the day, sources local and as far afield as California. It seems perhaps an uncommonly strange tale to tell for our area and those times. In parts poignant, at turns gruesome and grotesque, and truly sad beyond words, how such a fate befell first one decent and no doubt beloved soul and then another. For as it happened there was more than one railroad man murdered along the rails of the BCER that year in the span of a mere six months. In the end justice may have been served, in part at least, but it seems life's loose ends can't ever all be tied on this side of the Big Mystery. Some mysteries remain. Relationships hidden and motives unclear. But to be sure the dead are dead and gone. Gone from this realm. I have seen concrete and final evidence—photographs of the Magoon family's gravestones. The murdered man and eventually of course his family and early descendants are long

buried in one of the metropolitan area cemeteries of Greater Vancouver.

As alluded to, the historical record indicates that later that year, mere days before Christmas 1915, the authorities discovered something hideous wrapped in a sack at the bottom of a railside well, just some clicks westward down the tracks from Sumas

at another substation near Aldergrove; another BCER murder victim—this time that of a section hand named Nick Forcale (note: records show variant spellings). It was not a body intact that was found down that well. Nought but the poor man's hacked-off head. His naked headless body had already been found elsewhere, in the tiny railside shack nearby, a one-room cabin he had cohabited with a fellow section hand from his railroad gang. It was one Rocco Ferrante: the very same suspect accused, tried but acquitted in the murder trial concerning the death of Chief Engineer Magoon back in June of the year. Ferrante had just a week earlier relocated from Sumas to the Aldergrove location.

These telltale remains, the bits and pieces of information, lie scattered across the internet. I've respectfully gathered them in as best I can, though tragically they can never serve to fully enliven the angular-faced wavy-haired gentleman in the faded black & white photo image I dragged up from online searches concerning Magoon and the others. Yet in some way, perhaps something of the ill-fated chief engineer, if not the other considerably less-known victim, can be brought back to life in our imaginations after here necessarily connecting a few more of the blood-speckled dots.

The way it came to my attention at all: the first rag-and-bone discoveries began when I first came upon and viewed a not strictly related fifteen-minute filmstrip online. It was the 1950 final ceremonial run of the BCER Interurban passenger service. I was intrigued—as blurry as the video quality was, it transported me back in time to the decades before my birth when my parents and townsfolk knew the system, riding station to station as needed, providing passenger service out to Chilliwack beginning in 1910.

While I don't often peruse internet video comments,

*“It was one Rocco Ferrante:
the very same suspect accused,
tried but acquitted in the
murder trial concerning the
death of Chief Engineer Magoon
back in June of the year.”*

I was rather interested to see what folks were saying about the old Interurban. In particular I noted one startling comment on a related video. It was a clip which focused solely on the aforementioned Vye Road powerhouse substation (nearby what was Sumas Station) located in what are now of course the peaceful green pastures of Sumas Prairie

(formerly the aforementioned lake—shallow but several times larger than Cultus Lake) beyond the outskirts of Yarrow, nigh on what's now that wee border-town settlement at Arnold. The comment of note claimed the powerhouse in the video was the site of the commenter's great-grandfather's murder! At first blush I wasn't sure if I could believe it, as I'd never heard of such a crime, and people will for whatever reasons make attention-seeking claims. But I couldn't shake a gut feeling about this one.

The available archival evidence quickly added up. One Chief Engineer Jesse S. Magoon, born 1875 in Massachusetts, and just into his fortieth year, indeed died at the Sumas Station Powerhouse on the evening of June 12, 1915. Of that there is no doubt. And that this was a murder, not a suicide, was quickly determined to be the case. What follows in those records is the muddled story of two railroad murders just months apart that year, and the tale of the accused but acquitted re. the first murder, and the self-confessed but later confession-retracting screaming-at-the-gallows man found guilty of the second murder, and the messy week-to-week accounts in the press—sensationalized (of course)—and circulating far and wide and state-side down the coast, concerning the initial investigations, the following trials, and the eventual execution by hanging of the convicted man.

Although perhaps peripheral to the first crime (or in fact central if one is so inclined), we are quickly introduced to thin-on-details characters such as the young Majuba Hill schoolmistress Miss Elliott (she from that initial settlement overlooking the lake and what was eventually Yarrow's bottomland townsite, where British-born pioneers had first homesteaded on the forested slopes), the schoolmistress who was supposedly the unrequited love interest of the man eventually arrested:

Rocco Ferrante, known to both the slain railroad section hand and the slain chief engineer. Ferrante had in fact just delivered a personal letter to her that fateful June evening. As well, making cameo appearances that evening, a couple of young girls (sisters Barbara and Marion Bowman) who came by the powerhouse via automobile as passengers, and who heard and saw a small commotion and the supposed figure of Ferrante leaning out one of the powerhouse's upstairs windows, so observed to be appearing and disappearing several times at the bedroom window of Jesse Magoon. The young girls witnessed animated gestures, and vocalization perhaps directed at someone (unseen) but out of range of proper hearing.

As well, importantly, we hear of the friendship of the deceased and the accused. The chief engineer and the Sumas section hand had an apparently very amiable connection, often playing cards together in their free time, and sharing tales. Magoon was apparently teaching Ferrante, an Italian immigrant, how to improve his English. It seems they at times bunked in adjacent rooms upstairs in the imposing concrete grey powerhouse, though Ferrante had humbler quarters of his own in a shack nearby. The fire that roared through those sleeping quarters that evening, it was speculated, was likely set ablaze by Magoon's murderer (whoever he or she was) as distraction or to destroy evidence. In a frantic attempt to douse the fire and retrieve the just-discovered body, fellow BCER employees alerted to the billowing smoke had first leaned a tall ladder up to the window, but eventually broke down the locked inner door, and, in hurriedly carrying the body down to the lawn below (amid futile resuscitation attempts) as well as tossing out burning articles, lost critical scene-of-the-crime evidence for the investigators.

All this, though neither I nor anyone I know from my hometown nearby ever had heard told this bloody story of crime and punishment. I've concluded the eventual newly-arrived Russo-Germanic Mennonites of largely Dutch heritage who came a mere decade or so after the events herein described had too much of their own shared tragic history to deal with and still work through, only just escaping the cruel ravages of the Russian Civil War, Communist Revolution and man-made famine, and crimes of exponentially greater dimensions still haunting scarred bodies and minds right across these new communities in our beautiful but still strange new

land. Whether in Arnold or in Yarrow or other nearby locales, in such context, the story of one murdered railroad engineer, and one other related railroad worker's murder, wouldn't likely too loudly resonate across their ethnic telegraph at the time, even if concerning events from not so long before. However, from my perspective, standing here a little more than a century along, and having been born and raised just a few clicks up the tracks from the scene of the crime at Sumas, I see a significant story of madness, mystery and loss. Both like and unlike any other.

So it came to pass on August 15, 1916, a little more than one year after Jesse Magoon's forever unsolved murder, and a few months after poor Nick Forcale's most gruesome murder, a loudly wildly ranting Rocco Ferrante, necessarily strapped down to a heavy armchair, and refusing the attendant priest, was thus carried in



Sumas substation near Majuba Hill, 1965.

Photo: David Davies, Northern B.C. Archives and Special Collections.

that chair by guards to the scaffold, and still strapped and pinioned in that armchair was, for his self-confessed crime (the decapitation of Forcale), hanged at the provincial jail at New Westminster.

One could surmise the two crimes were connected. That the two victims fell by the same hands. But that remains unproven. The lingering questions have me going back to the silent steel and concrete grey powerhouse of yore, in the imagined company of these assorted players, and the various witnesses, all those in

turn called to the stand to testify. And, as to a shadowy stage murky with mystery, all's momentarily spotlighted again as in the glaring nighttime head beam of some great old vintage freight locomotive bearing down. In that fleeting, revealing but perhaps still blinding light,

The Powerhouse

■ By Helen Rose Pauls

A huge grey monolith against the mountain, almost on the railroad tracks by Vye Road, was a fixture of my childhood in the little Mennonite community of Arnold. It was a Sunday afternoon walking destination while the parents napped; a private out-of-the-way place for an evening of necking; a place to catch bats by crawling through the roof hatch and prying back the metal roofing under which they slept. It was a place to show off to friends and onlookers as we tiptoed breathlessly around the upper parapet, the concrete sidewalk a hundred feet below! We were invincible.

"Meet you at the powerhouse," we yelled, and off we'd go on our bikes. Inside, it was dangerous, with huge open squares in the cement floors that once held tall machinery. There were no railings around long drop-offs and once a girl fell through and suffered a concussion. Farm boys stoned the upper windows to bits, and we wrestled the doors open to explore the two apartments right in front, on either side of the big front door, once lived in by the chief electricians and their families. They had indoor plumbing and ornate fixtures. In 1956, Hungarian families lived in these suites; their first home away from home after the Communist suppression far away.

Behind the station a creek trickled by and a path along it up the mountain led to the Arnold Water Works, an elaborate system of screens and cement holding ponds leading to wooden pipes that fed water into every farm and house in the community. My dad was in charge of its wellbeing, and we drained the ponds and cleaned the screens every Saturday, parking by the powerhouse and skirting it to climb up the mountain path. When the ponds filled up again, some silt was loosened and the first stream into the neighborhood taps was muddy. Mothers, anxious to finish Saturday chores, said, "Oh, it's John Goerzen washing his boots again!"

In 1906, the BC Electric Railway Company built several massive powerhouse substations of steel, brick

all we can do is ponder what these records say of some dark deeds committed, and the unknown motives behind them, in that long-ago year, right here where we've all lived along that familiar old railroad.

and cement that controlled electricity to one of Metro Vancouver's longest travelling interurban streetcar lines that ran all the way from Vancouver to Chilliwack. The tram brought not only passengers to all the small towns between these two destinations, it also brought out goods, and returned with farm products, chiefly milk in huge numbered cans to the milk plant in New Westminster. The next day, empties were returned. My father and many others struggled to get the heavy cans up the incline to the tram, where the porters swung them into the train cars. Students as young as six waited on the raised dyke for the tram to transport them from Arnold to Upper Sumas School, a seven-kilometre ride.

But soon rails turned to rubber as more and more freight and people relied on trucks and passenger cars. Cities were adapting to personal vehicles. By 1950, the rail became obsolete and that September, the tram stopped running. The powerhouse became useless and slowly sank into disrepair. Canadian Pacific Railway eventually bought the rails and freight trains can still be seen about twice a day, hauling their loads on the dyke past Arnold, near Majuba Hill, through Yarrow, over the Vedder River train bridge to Greendale and on towards Chilliwack.

A few years ago, the Sumas Substation became a private residence, completely repaired, with a shiny coat of paint. According to a former real estate listing, it has eight bedrooms, three legal suites, two lofts, a wine cellar, a theatre, and several balconies. An elevator rides through a previous shaft to the roof hatch, providing magnificent views of the farms in the valley and of Sumas Prairie. And now, online, one can read a history of the building and view the posh interior of the refurbished powerhouse. Or better still, if you can afford it, spend a night there through Airbnb.

A Few Moments in the Story of Dutch Mennonites

■ By Robert Martens

An eccentric land

When Dutch Anabaptists appeared on the scene, the Lowlands were in a state of ferment. The country had been at war with rebellious Frisian peasants between 1515 and 1523. Peasants and townsfolk were meeting in small conventicles, interpreting the Scripture as they saw fit, not as the Catholic Church instructed them to do. Anabaptists of the era were frequently apocalyptic. As war and revolt enveloped the continent, they saw the forces of flux as signs of the end times. The German town of Münster was seized by Anabaptist adherents, many of them Dutch. In Amsterdam, twelve Anabaptist men and women stripped off their clothes and ran through town yelling “Truth is naked!” Anabaptists were among a crowd that staged an abortive uprising at the city courthouse; the rebels were captured and executed.

Menno Simons was faced with a movement that was threatening to disintegrate in a chaos of anti-state sentiment and activity. A master organizer, he collected the peaceful elements of the Anabaptist movement and denounced all violence as unchristian. In 1542 he visited Amsterdam but soon was forced to flee for his life. The state, ignoring Menno’s declarations of nonresistance, condemned the entire Anabaptist movement as violent and revolutionary.

Nevertheless, the Anabaptist church grew rapidly. Reflecting the turmoil of the times, Anabaptist-Mennonites broke up into opposing congregations and factions, which then often broke up again. Still, the gospel of good works was common to all of them, and in that sense, cooperation was the norm. Through the warfare and dissension of the next five hundred years, that would be a constant.

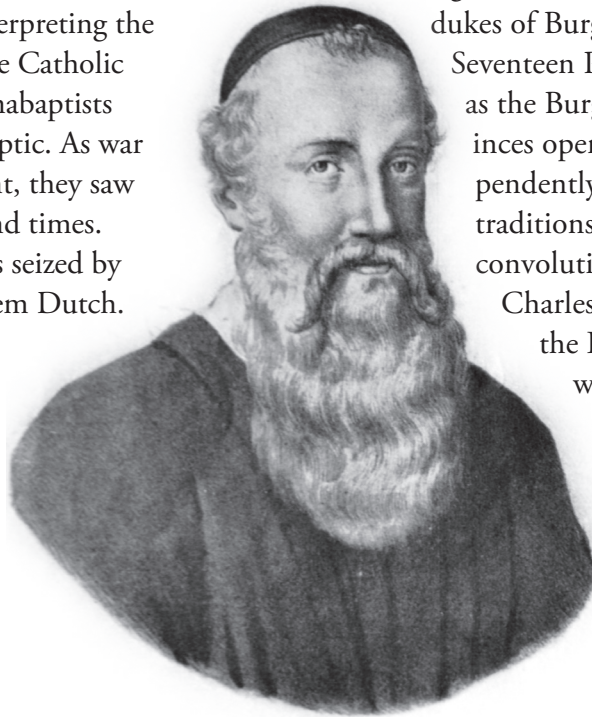
Suppression and control

The Lowlands were the target of foreign domination for many decades. The Low Countries (Nederland) consisted of seventeen provinces; the northern sections would eventually be known as the Netherlands, and the southern, as Belgium. Through shrewd marriage arrangements as well as outright warfare, the dukes of Burgundy had taken control of the Seventeen Provinces, which became known as the Burgundian Circle. The various provinces operated, for a time, relatively independently, practising their own laws and traditions. Everything changed when the convolutions of European politics allowed Charles V of Ghent to take control of the Lowlands in 1506. In 1515 he was proclaimed king of Spain and, a few years later, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Charles sent Spanish legates to rule over the Low Countries. The Spanish overlords flouted local customs, angering Lowlanders and inciting revolt.

The Netherlands was a valuable commodity. The area had developed prosperous industries in fishing and wool, and was rapidly urbanizing, boasting some of the larger cities in

Europe. Philip, who succeeded Charles on the Spanish throne, was determined to rule the Lowlands with an iron thumb. He was also a Catholic bigot, disgusted by the Protestant Reformation, and happily sanctioned Spanish duplicity and mass murder in the Lowlands.

Finally, in 1568, William of Orange led a revolt against the Spanish oppressors. The conflict he started, now known as the Eighty Years War, would not end, tragically, until 1648 and the Treaty of Westphalia. In the meantime, however, he forced the surrender of Amsterdam in 1578. Though William was a Calvinist, now the dominant religion in the northern provinces, Amsterdam became a city of refuge for Anabaptist-Mennonites. The southern provinces, later Belgium, were to remain Catholic.



An artist's rendering of Menno Simons in *Unser Menno: Blicke in das Leben und Wirken Menno Simons* by G.J. Classen.

Raduga Press, Halbstadt, Taurien, n.d.

A Dutch commercial empire

By the early 1600s, Holland had entered the Golden Age. The Dutch were arguably the wealthiest people in Europe, and operated as a continental or even global hub of trade into the eighteenth century. The Dutch invention of the sawmill allowed for the rapid expansion of a trading fleet. The Amsterdam Bank of Exchange was founded to support such enormous enterprises as the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie). The Lowlands were also a cauldron of creativity: Grotius was a prodigious scholar in law and politics; Leeuwenhoek invented (or vastly improved) the microscope; and Rembrandt, Vermeer, and Mennonite Jacob van Ruisdael were luminaries in the world of art.

Mennonites, especially the urbane and prosperous grouping known as the Waterlanders, were enthusiastic participants in the new domain of commerce. Some were sucked into the tulip bubble of the 1620s and 1630s in which fortunes were made and lost, yet Mennonites were frequently in the forefront of the booming capitalist economy. The Waterlanders were the largest and oldest Mennonite faction residing in Amsterdam. At least twenty board members of the Waterlander church held accounts in the Amsterdam Bank of Exchange. Board members were heavily involved in the textile trade, and through shrewd business dealings and arranged marriage, were gaining access to the Dutch national elite. Along the Vecht River near Amsterdam, Mennonite mansions were so profuse that the area was nicknamed Mennonite Heaven.

It was a time of great tolerance. Mennonite churches, formerly disguised as ordinary house or business fronts, emerged from their hiding places. Yet wealthy Mennonites faced obstacles that others, for example, the Calvinists, did not. The Mennonite churches, still clinging to their original precepts, forbade their members from trading on ships armed with cannon. Mennonites were also hampered by their churches' convictions on

non-participation in government. The very upper levels of society were thus barred to even the most prosperous of Mennonites.

The rise of rationalism

The concept of Reason as the governing force of humankind was gathering steam, and the Dutch were among the first to embrace rationalism as a philosophy of life and lifestyle. Among Calvinists, a group of dissenters called Arminians wished to downgrade Calvinist dogma, particularly the principle of predestination. The

Arminians, followers of theology professor Jacobus Arminius, were expelled from their church. Refusing to back off, many of them joined small discussion groups that were known as "colleges." These liberal dissenters, the Collegiants, rejected dogmas, creeds, and confessions, and denounced the greater institutional church as hopelessly corrupt. Collegiants claimed to believe in and act according to an inner light. This inner light, however, soon developed into a concept very similar to Reason itself—the Collegiants were assimilating into the broader progressive European society.

Many Dutch Mennonites felt that they had much in common with the Collegiants and joined

the new rationalist movement. The great philosopher Descartes, himself resident in the Lowlands for many years, was a great influence on them. So was the Jewish genius Spinoza, who was ejected from his own community for his freethinking. Spinoza became good friends with several members of a Mennonite congregation led by a talented thinker and minister, Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan.

The War of the Lambs

Galenus was the leader of Amsterdam United Mennonite, commonly known as *by het lam*, "near the lamb," since it was situated near a brewery called The Lamb. Galenus Abrahamsz was attracted to the



William I, Prince of Orange by Adriaen Thomasz. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 1679.

Image: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_the_Silent.

Collegiants' ideology based on tolerance and personal inspiration. By 1650, though still a loyal Mennonite minister, Galenus had become a full-fledged Collegiant. He tried, and failed, to merge his own progressive church with the even more "liberal" Waterlanders.

Traditionalists in his congregation were turning suspicious and then angry. Galenus wrote a book in the hope that the expression of his views might help mitigate the quarrel. The book had the opposite effect. Galenus' defence of personal insight and complete tolerance of the other's point of view simply proved to traditionalists that the author was nearly heretical. "Conservatives" Samuel Apostool and Tobias Govertsz van den Wijngaert led the fight on behalf of the principles of inspiration of Scripture and church.

At that point, "all hell broke loose." The War of the Lambs, the *Lamenkrijg*, stands out in Mennonite history as one of its bitterest conflicts: "Galenus and Apostool attacked each other from the pulpit, pamphlets were written for and against each side, and the Mennonite services grew so rancorous that spectators came from all over the city to watch the battles" (Fix 170). Galenus was accused in court of freethinking heresy. He was cleared, but then a struggle ensued over the church treasury. When Galenus successfully took control of the treasury, the traditionalist elements in his church split off and formed their own congregation: De Zon, "The Sun," named after the former brewery in which they assembled.

The conflict was contagious: similar disputes between progressives and traditionalists took place in Leiden, Rotterdam, Haarlem, and Amsterdam. The Waterlanders actually merged with the Lamists in 1668.



House used as a Mennonite church in Pingjum, northern Holland, now a museum. Photo source: Julia M. Toews 2008

The War of the Lambs carried on, at first viciously and then gradually easing, until 1801, when Lamists and Zonists finally merged.

Decline

For various reasons, the 1700s were a time of decline for Dutch Mennonites. Their birth rate had fallen off; inbreeding took its toll; a general economic stagnation prevailed in the Netherlands; and as the Industrial Revolution created a whole new class of workers living in misery, middle-class Mennonites lost their ethical cachet when they displayed little empathy for suffering labourers.

And the Mennonite church was no longer distinct. "Traditional Mennonite principles, such as not bearing arms and the rejection of public office, had melted like snow in summer during the last twenty-five years of the eighteenth century" (Voolstra 190). Many "liberal" Mennonites supported the French Revolution, with some young men joining the *Vrijcorpsen*, the free corps militia. Disillusionment set in, however, when Napoleon decided to inculcate Europe with liberal ideas by devastating the continent. Some Mennonites now became loyalists to the regime: "For their part," said a prominent spokesperson, "[Mennonites] find no reason to complain of the national government, but honour and revere the king God has bestowed on us; they love him as the father of the nation" (Blaupot ten Cate, qtd. in Voolstra 191).

Still, the Mennonite church persisted and survived. In 1735 it established a seminary (Kweekschool) in Amsterdam, which exists in a different form to this day. The Society for Public Welfare was created in the home of a Mennonite minister in 1784. The Society, a national secular organization which was vigorously supported by Mennonites in the years to come, was a strong advocate of universal education. It also supported the creation of insurance firms and banks which would release philanthropy from the purse-strings of the church.

Hearts and minds

The assimilationist/traditionalist conflict continued into the nineteenth century, heavily influenced by the tension between the age of Reason and the emerging age of Romanticism. Reason looked forward to an optimistic future of prosperity and global tolerance; Romanticism

looked back, and inward, to a time of feeling and face-to-face community. Progressive Mennonites carried the torch for fraternity, liberty and equality; “[b]ut was the price of freedom not too high when it involved an almost total loss of identity?” (Voolstra 195)

Traditionalists stubbornly maintained their ground. A Mennonite preacher in Groningen wrote, “This was not the way of our forefathers. Even if they could have obtained such worldly advantages, distinctions, offices and insignias, yes even if these had been offered to them, I believe they would have refused” (K.S. Sybrandi, qtd. in Voolstra 195). In 1853, the conservative Mennonite congregation in Balk, Friesland, left en masse for North America in an attempt to maintain its identity.

But a middle ground was also being sought. “The Mennonites looked for a practical-ethical middle course between Rationalism without heart and Romanticism without reason” (Voolstra 196). As noted, the War of the Lambs came to an end. And in 1811, the *Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit* (ADS: General Mennonite Conference) was formed to help unite disparate factions. The ADS was never, however, the “head” of an organization; initially, its specific purpose was merely to raise funds for the Amsterdam seminary.

In another attempt to unite warring parties, German national Samuel Muller was invited to head the seminary in Amsterdam. Muller was to become one of the strongest advocates for moderation in Dutch Mennonite history. “He taught Mennonites that they were as good as members of other churches, and in fact, even better: Mennonites were the truly Dutch reformed church” (Verbeek & Hoekema 71). Muller was a powerful force among Mennonites, and even on the national secular scale; he served as governor of the Society for Public Welfare. Under his watch, charities, missions, and artistic creativity thrived. While a physico-theology had emerged, teaching that God can be observed through the world itself, Muller referred back to the teachings of Erasmus and advocated a life based on ethics.

Muller had his opponents, however, and in the end, may have lost the battle. A contemporary, D. S. Gorter, wrote, “My full preference for a believers’ church has succumbed to reality. I saw every believers’ church becoming a public church as if of its own accord. Mennonite practice has taught the impossibility of preserving a distinct Christian community” (qtd. in Voolstra 200).



Lamb & sun symbols on a Mennonite church in northern Holland, 2008.

Photo credit: Julia M. Toews

The twentieth century

Yet the next century saw a return, of sorts, in the Mennonite distinctives. In 1917, the Congregations Day movement was launched; it involved the building of retreat centres and the teachings of abstinence, nonresistance, and reliance on Scripture. The Task Force Against Military Service was established in 1923 and lasted until 1940. Several Mennonite conscientious objectors served prison terms. A ministry was undertaken to communicate with the Mennonite “diaspora” of rural folk who moved to urban centres in search of employment. In the 1920s Dutch Mennonites generously supported their Russian counterparts who were fleeing the Soviet Union. The ADS was strong, with women taking some leadership roles. And Dutch Mennonites enthusiastically participated in the 1936 Mennonite World Conference held in Amsterdam.

Yet Hitler’s National Socialism produced a challenge. So used to tolerance and open welcome were Dutch Mennonites that in 1937 an executive member of the ADS did not exclude National Socialists from joining the Sociëteit: “In our congregations the Kingdom of God is preached, which is not of this world; therefore all political persuasions may feel at home in our midst” (qtd. in Verbeek & Hoekema 84).

The Second World War generated Mennonite casualties on all sides. “A few joined the German army or supported Nazi ideology, and died for that reason. Many more were killed for belonging to resistance groups, were attacked during bombings or perished because of

the forced labour they had to do in German factories” (Verbeek & Hoekema 85). About one hundred Dutch Mennonites lost their lives in the concentration camps of the Third Reich.

Decline once again

The Dutch Mennonite church took on a new face after the war. Members became active in social causes; youth groups were formed, and feminism took root, with a woman heading the ADS for the first time. The Dutch Mennonite Peace Group was founded in 1946. Its adherents opposed war in Indonesia and Vietnam and made presentations in schools, churches, and homes. In 1947 Bijzondere Noden, Special Needs, was established. The organization was active in aid to Paraguayan Mennonites and Russian Mennonite refugees, with some of its members serving within the Mennonite Central Committee.

Missions were established in Java and Papua. Books were written on Anabaptist theology and practice. The Mennonite Historical Society (Doopsgezinde Historische Kring) was created in 1974. Once again there was animated participation at the Amsterdam Mennonite World Conference in 1967. Young Dutch people were entering the ministry, leading congregations in which youth felt uncomfortable with baptism but were happy to be engaged in discussion and social causes. The spirituality of Iona and Taizé were being integrated into worship.

Yet the number of Mennonite church members declined from 40,000 in 1940 to 10,000 in 2006. Religion generally had lost its appeal for a secularized society, and Dutch Mennonites were not exempt from the trend. Once again, Anabaptist-Mennonites were

practising small group worship but was this the beginning of something—or the end? “[T]o be honest,” write Dutch Mennonite commentators, “for several small congregations it may be too late; much as happened in the eighteenth century, several of these congregations may disappear in the coming decades” (Verbeek & Hoekema 96).

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Anabaptist-Mennonites and Islam

■ By Robert Martens

Eighthly, if the Turks should come, we ought not to resist them. For it is written, Thou shalt not kill. We must not defend ourselves against the Turks and others of our persecutors, but are to beseech God with earnest prayer to repel and resist them. But that I said that, if warring were right, I would rather take the field against so-called Christians who persecute, capture, and kill pious Christians than against the Turks, was for the following reason. The Turk is a true Turk, knows nothing of the Christian faith, and is a

Turk after the flesh. But you who would be Christians and who make your boast of Christ persecute the pious witnesses of Christ and are Turks after the spirit (Sattler, qtd. in Klaassen 270).

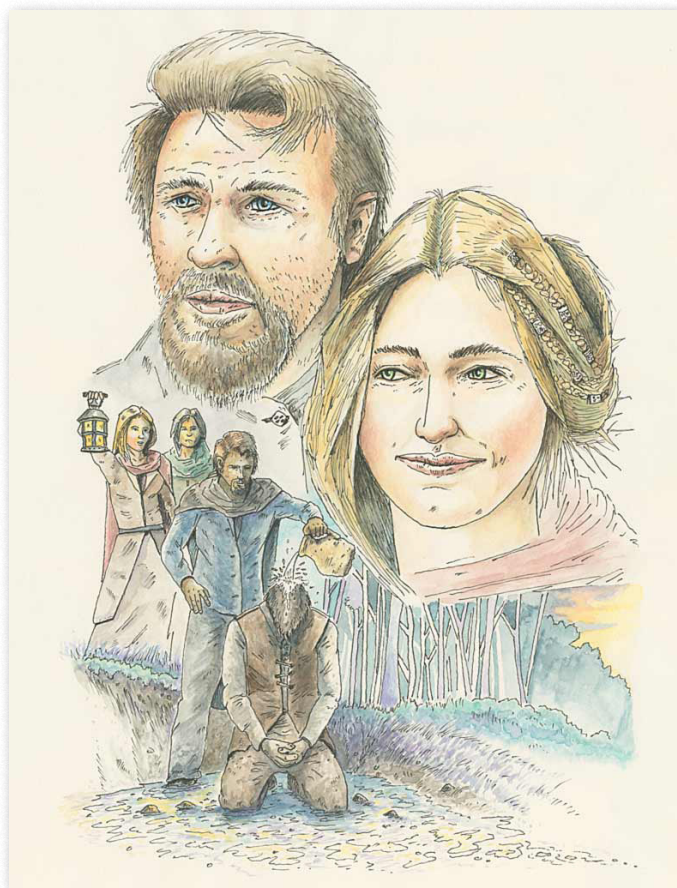
These words were spoken by Anabaptist Michael Sattler at his 1527 trial in Rottenburg am Neckar for heresy and treason. Even in the current arena of politics, Sattler’s sentiments might seem shocking, and he spoke these words while facing certain death

before a kangaroo court. The Ottoman empire was a huge threat to Europe at the time. In that context, pacifism itself seemed treasonous to many, and Sattler was not only pacifist—he was stating that, if he were not pacifist, he would choose rather to fight militarily against the Holy Roman Empire in which he lived than face off against the Muslim Turks of the Ottoman empire.

Not all Anabaptists agreed with Sattler's declaration. Anabaptists were a diverse bunch. There were those, for example, who believed that the Turks represented divine justice and that the apocalypse was at hand. Others believed in the moral legitimacy of taking up the sword. And then, over the decades, attitudes changed among Anabaptist-Mennonites as hostilities with the Ottomans climaxed and then dwindled, peace was negotiated, and trade was eventually initiated with the former enemies of Europe. Michael Sattler's famous declaration, though, is a good starting point for examining the relationships between Anabaptist-Mennonites and Islam.

The Ottoman threat

"Now shalt thou feel the force of Turkish arms / Which lately made all Europe quake for fear." These two lines were written in 1587 by Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe in his trendsetting play *Tamburlaine* (part 1, act 3, scene 3). They graphically express the fear of Europeans that they would be overrun by a Muslim army and that Christianity might be extinguished. During the sixteenth century, a time when forces for and against the Reformation were struggling with each other, the Ottomans had the largest army in Europe. Istanbul, their capital, was five times larger than Paris: "Indeed, between 1520



Artist's rendering of Michael and Margaretha Sattler drawn by Jason Landsel.

Image: www.plough.com, forerunner series. Used by permission.

and 1565 its momentum seemed unstoppable. Well might Christians in western Europe 'quake for fear'" (Woodward 2).

Since 1354 the Ottomans had been expanding westward, and in 1453 seized the Christian city of Constantinople, renaming it Istanbul. By 1520 the Ottomans ruled the Muslim world. At the Ottoman empire's height, the Turks, under the brilliant leadership of Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-66), captured Belgrade, overran Hungary, and besieged Vienna. That siege was broken only by bad weather. Holy Roman Emperor Charles V was barely hanging

on to his European dominions, and was continually thwarted by German princes demanding concessions from him in return for their support. Charles' brother Ferdinand ruled the Austrian lands of the Holy Roman Empire. Under the strain of war and possible conquest, Ferdinand was mercilessly subduing all opposition, especially the Anabaptists.

The war was going so badly for the Holy Roman Empire that it was forced to pay tribute to the Ottomans in order for Europe to maintain control of a small part of Hungary. The Christian Balkans had already been overrun during the Turkish drive for Constantinople. Most of the Balkan Christian aristocracy were executed by their conquerors; the peasantry, however, lived better under the Ottomans than they had under their Christian overlords. "Christians, though encouraged to convert to Islam, were allowed religious toleration and mixed marriages, and the comparative freedom and contentment enjoyed by its people is one of the most important explanations why the Balkans remained under Ottoman rule for over 400 years" (Woodward 5-6).

Finally, during the Long War of 1593-1606, the Turks suffered their first setbacks. Their power dwindled, the Europeans gradually gained the upper hand, and a final peace treaty was signed in 1686. Reasons for the decline of the Ottoman empire are varied: the Europeans developed the better military by emphasizing drill and discipline; the supply lines from Istanbul to European frontiers were too long to be sustained; and after Suleiman the Magnificent died, a series of incompetent rulers occupied the Ottoman throne. However, international commerce was increasing, and economic considerations certainly played a role in the final achievement of peace.

Transitions

Pacifism was not a new concept in sixteenth century Europe. Monks, for example, had long been forbidden to kill. The great Catholic scholar Erasmus wrote, “To me it not even seems recommendable that we should be preparing war against the Turks. The Christian religion is in a bad way, if its safety depends on this sort of defence. Nor is it consistent to make good Christians under these auspices. What is taken by the sword is lost by the sword” (qtd. in Bender 2).

Anabaptists were among the most vocal in espousing pacifism. Hans Denck wrote that a true security would only be achieved “with practice of the true gospel that each will let the other move and dwell in peace—be he Turk or heathen, believing what he will ...” (qtd. in Klaassen 292). But initially, Anabaptism was

“...initially, Anabaptism was a movement of great disparity, as its believers struggled to unite and form a community within a hostile state.”

a movement of great disparity, as its believers struggled to unite and form a community within a hostile state. Some were not at all pacifist. Balthasar Hubmaier, an early Anabaptist leader, defended the use of the sword in maintaining peace and security; Hans Hut preached an apocalyptic judgement in which God’s true children would finally rise; and extremist Anabaptists took the town of Münster and defended it with its own fighting force.

Michael Sattler, though, represents the central and stabilizing core of the emerging Anabaptist movement. An expert organizer, he desired nothing more than a peaceful community of God’s believers.

Sattler’s brief life

Not much is known about Michael Sattler’s life. He was born about 1490, received a basic education, and lived as a Benedictine monk in the monastery of St. Peter near Freiburg. At some point, the earnest and uncompromising young man lost his faith in the Roman Catholic Church. He left the monastery and married Margaretha, a Beguine nun. Sattler began a life as a fugitive, preaching the Anabaptist gospel while trying to keep one step ahead of Ferdinand’s security forces. In 1525 he was hauled into a Zurich court along with co-defendants Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, and Georg Blaurock; the four were banished from the city. During his forced travels, Sattler met fellow Anabaptist Hans Denck, but the two could not agree on much: Denck emphasized the inner life, while Sattler was an organizer par excellence.

Sattler moved on to Strasbourg, where he engaged in debate with Protestant reformers Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito. “Sattler realized the untenability of his situation. On the one hand, he must have feared that the learned theologians would influence him to change his mind, which would for him denote a denial and blasphemy of God. On the other hand, he feared

that if he persisted in his views he would fall into the hands of the authorities” (Bossert et al. 3).

In 1527 Sattler presided over the Schleithem conference, a pivotal event in the Anabaptist story. The Schleithem Confession which emerged from the conference may have been drafted by Sattler. It was uncompromising in its seven declarations; for example, “A separation shall be made from the evil and from the wickedness which the devil planted in the world; in this manner, simply that we shall not have fellowship with them (the wicked) and not run with them in the multitude of their abominations” (Schleithem). The Confession also forbade violence and the taking of the oath; it laid out Anabaptist principles for baptism, the ban, and the partaking of communion.

It was a martyrs’ confession. Most of the individuals present at Schleithem had their lives cut short. Michael Sattler was caught by surprise in the town of Rottenburg,

imprisoned along with several others, including his wife, and charged to appear in court.

The trial

The authorities, however, did not have a free pass. Support for Sattler and pleas for mercy were widespread. This was startling to those in power, and it was decided to take no chances: Sattler's trial judgement would come from official judges rather than an unreliable lay jury. Even then, some universities refused to send representatives to sit on the jury, arguing that a death sentence—which was certain—would prohibit jury members from entering the priesthood.

The fourteen defendants in the trial were charged with nine offences. The first accused Anabaptists of defying the law of the Holy Roman Empire, "which placed the Anabaptists on the same level as the Turks..." (Bossert et al. 7). Other lesser charges focused on the desecration of Church sacraments, but these were religious matters, and really not the purview of a civil court. To the charge of counselling fellow citizens not to participate in the war against the Ottomans, Sattler replied with his now famous statement (above); it was brutally honest and fearless.

The jury's decision on a sentence took one and a half hours, longer than anticipated, indicating that there may not have been complete unanimity. The sentence, however, showed no mercy. According to *Martyrs Mirror*, "... Michael Sattler shall be delivered to the executioner, who shall lead him to the place of execution, and cut out his tongue; then throw him upon a wagon, and there tear his body twice with red hot tongs; and after he has been brought without the gate, he shall be pinched five times in the same manner" (418). Sattler was burned as a heretic and his wife, drowned.

The "maturing" of Anabaptism

Sattler's views on "tolerating" the Turks were really a reaction against the brutality of his home country. Other



Cover of the Qu'ran translated by Glazemaker. Image: google search mohamets.jpg

Anabaptists took more nuanced views. The spiritualist Anabaptist David Joris argued that the Turkish state, in comparison with Europe, was a model of toleration. In 1539, a South German Anabaptist, Hans Umlauf, wrote, "God can make children of Abraham even from stones. We ought to listen carefully to the saying of Christ that many from the east and from the west (who have been called Turks and heathens) will come and sit at table with Abraham in the kingdom of God" (qtd. in Waite 1001).

Menno Simons, however, preoccupied with the violent uprising at Münster, barely mentioned the Turks. He was too busy with organizing, perhaps, and staying alive. Besides, attitudes were changing. By the 1600s, Dutch traders were

contacting their counterparts in the Ottoman empire. And Europeans were fascinated by the exotic speech and garb of Turkish delegates to the continent.

A "conservative" Mennonite and Islam: Pieter Jansz Twisck

Dutch Anabaptist-Mennonites were also interested in Turks and their Islamic faith. It is possible that the early Anabaptist pleas for tolerance, such as those expressed by Michael Sattler, became part of the Mennonite psychological makeup, even as the decades passed. Views on Islam, however, became more sophisticated as the Mennonite community solidified and was generally tolerated in seventeenth century Holland.

Pieter Jansz Twisck, an Old Frisian Mennonite preacher in Hoorn, wrote extensively on Turkish-European relations. In his *Chronijk*, however, he sometimes reverts to the silliest Turkish stereotypes prevalent in his era. He writes, for example, that "when a Christian desires to become a Turk, before he is circumcised, he must go into the Christian church and ridicule it, casting stones at it, to the revilement of the Christian religion" (qtd. in Waite 1006). In

his biography of Muhammad, Twisck suggests that the Prophet was subject to epilepsy that generated illusions of a laughably false revelation. A good pacifist, Twisck compares Islam and the Roman Catholic church when he accuses Muhammad of “planting his law which he introduced in the Roman manner not only with teaching, but with sword and violence” (qtd. in Waite 1008).

Twisck considered himself a churchman in the tradition of Menno Simons. He was an organizer, not given to the subtleties of theology or politics. Yet his writings indicate an extraordinary interest in Islam, and in fact he was a moderate of his time: in his writings, Twisck toned down traditional European anti-Muslim invective.

A “progressive” Mennonite and the Qur’an: Jan Hendriksz Glazemaker

During the 1650s, in Amsterdam, a scientist, alchemist, and Mennonite elder, Galenus Abrahamsz, was presiding over a split in his Flemish *Doopsgezind* congregation. Abrahamsz insisted that anyone who was pacifist and devout should be admitted to the celebration of the Lord’s supper. He failed in this attempt but continued to immerse himself in a kind of spiritual alchemy, looking for a unifying principle in all religions.

Among Abrahamsz’ congregants was a celebrated scholar, Jan Hendriks Glazemaker, who translated at least sixty-eight works in his lifetime, including those of Seneca, Homer, Spinoza and Descartes. He also translated the Qur’an: according to University of New Brunswick professor Gary K. Waite, Glazemaker’s translation emerged from an “international band of nonconformists whose hopes for a new world and overwhelming quest to find unity in all things, both spiritual and material, led them to re-evaluate Islam, bringing its holy book into the cool light of the Dutch sun” (1012).

Glazemaker knew no Arabic. His Qur’an was a translation of a French version published by Andrew du Ryer in 1647. The du Ryer Qur’an was imperfect but popular and influential, and an attempt to explain the Book with reasonable objectivity. Glazemaker was no apologist for Islam, and was in fact trying to demonstrate the falsity of Muslim beliefs. In his translation, he retains du Ryer’s original preface which was extremely biased, claiming

that “you will be amazed that these fallacies have infected the best part of the world” (qtd. in Waite 1014). Glazemaker also includes, however, du Ryer’s “Summary of the Religion of the Turks,” a relatively straightforward and objective effort to explain Muslim beliefs to Europeans. Glazemaker’s book also contains a biography of Muhammad written by an Egyptian Coptic Christian. This biography in fact puts the Prophet in a favourable light. Coptic Christians, living in constant proximity with Muslims, preferred to live in harmony with their fellow citizens.

In other words, Glazemaker was attempting to present a balance of opinion on Islam. “He obviously intended,” writes Terry Waite, “to cause Christians to rethink not only their prejudicial attitude toward Islam, but also to use the Qur’an as a tool to reconsider the nature of their own belief system” (1015). This may, perhaps, be overstating the case: after all, Glazemaker was a devoted member of the *Doopsgezind*. But he may have been the inheritor of the legacy of early Anabaptists, such as Michael Sattler, whose unrelenting persecution by the Roman Catholic Church drove them to tolerate and re-evaluate the claims of the European enemy: the Ottomans and Islam.

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■ Reviewed by Robert Martens

Indonesia might seem an odd place to host the 2022 Mennonite World Conference. It is a country of some seventeen thousand islands and six to seven hundred languages, the most populous Muslim state on the globe, a land with a bloody and turbulent history of colonialism and rebellion. And yet, writes John Roth in his new book, *A Cloud of Witnesses*, some eighty-one percent of Anabaptist-Mennonites now reside in the Global South. The Indonesian island of Java is home to a large Mennonite population that has survived against the odds. The seaport city of Semarang in northern Java seems a very appropriate location to bring global Anabaptist-Mennonites together.

In preparation for Mennonite World Conference, now facing a major complication in the COVID pandemic, John Roth, professor of history at Goshen College, has written a brief introduction to Indonesia and its Mennonite churches. The islands were first settled about twelve thousand years ago—this is an ancient land. Hinduism and Buddhism strove for control over this archipelago, but Islam eventually won the battle, although how that happened remains unclear. Europeans first arrived in 1512, seeking to plunder the islands for their natural resources. With the formation of the Dutch United East India Company in 1602, the Netherlands took control of the “East Indies.” A long history of exploitation, forced labour, and bloody rebellions followed.

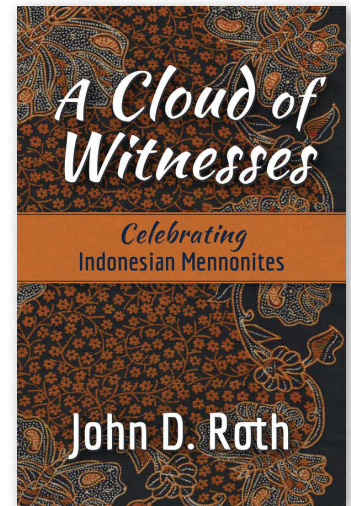
Then, during the Second World War, the Japanese invaded and ruled with a brutality that rivalled the atrocities of the Dutch. Nevertheless, a young independence fighter, Sukarno, cooperated with the Japanese with the goal of driving out the hated Europeans. He and his followers succeeded. In 1945,

at the end of World War II, Sukarno, “the father of modern Indonesia,” declared the country’s independence. Shamefully, the Netherlands only granted formal recognition to Indonesia in 1949, after pressure from the United Nations.

As president, Sukarno eventually proved as authoritarian as his predecessors. He was pushed out in the 1960s by Suharto, who led an “anticommunist” movement that murdered between 500,000 and one million Indonesians, many of them ethnic Chinese. However, economic conditions improved substantially, and today, though still a comparatively impoverished nation, Indonesia has achieved a degree of prosperity.

The story of Indonesian Mennonites is stranger than fiction. In fact, writes Roth, “The persistence—and, ultimately the flourishing—of Javanese Anabaptist-Mennonite churches ... is nothing short of a miracle” (79). The Mennonite Mission Society (Doopsgezinde Zendings Vereniging), was formed in 1847 to evangelize the colonials. Though intentions may have been good, missions were considered a “civilizing influence,” an integral part of the colonizing effort. In any case, Indonesia became the first country to be evangelized by Mennonites—by the Dutch, and a few years later, by Russian Mennonites as well.

In 1851, Pieter and Wilhelmina Jansz arrived from Holland to promote Mennonite churches in Indonesia. They never returned to their European home. Jansz, a discerning individual in many ways, soon discovered that his sermons, perceived by the locals as colonialist, were stirring up resentment. He



Tunggul Wulung. Portrait by Semarang artist Inanta, commissioned by Lawrence Yoder.

Image source: [www. Google.ca/search](http://www.Google.ca/search)



Pieter Jansz and Javanese associate translating the Bible.

Image source: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter Jansz p](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Jansz_p). Taken from the Dutch journal *Doopgezinde Bijdragen*, vol. 44 (1904), facing p. 36

turned to Indonesian lay evangelists for support and began social reform efforts, such as opening schools. Still, progress was painfully slow. Years of work resulted in a mere handful of converts.

At this point, the odd figure of Tunggul Wulung enters the picture. A former revolutionary, Tunggul Wulung was also a mystic who heard voices and saw visions. He came to believe, upon studying the Bible, that Jesus was the “Just King,” a Messiah who would liberate Java, the largest of the Indonesian islands. He set up self-sustaining rural communities that would live separate from Islam, from the opium in common use, and from Dutch oppressive measures such as forced labour. These communities would live freely and disconnected from the mainstream as they waited for the return of the Just King.

At some point, Tunggul Wulung met Pieter Jansz, who was fascinated by the ideal of separate rural settlements, perhaps because these villages seemed to parallel the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision practised by European Mennonites for centuries. This odd couple, Tunggul Wulung and Pieter Jansz, collaborated at a distance, each of them having distinct goals in mind but sharing a common

interest in sustaining the rural Christian communities. Though Tunggul Wulung was a syncretist, drawing elements of Indonesian animistic culture into his belief system, eventually the communities were drawn into the orbit of the Mennonite Mission.

Pieter Jansz’s son, Pieter Anthonie, founded two more settlements, and the church grew. A shadow existed, though, at the heart of the endeavour. Mennonite missionaries were controlling and colonial in their outlook, and delayed as long as possible the handover of control to local leaders. And yet, a church was planted—in fact, three Mennonite conferences, or synods, would develop over the years. The development of the synods was marked by conflict even though, as Roth remarks, Indonesian culture stresses “social balance and harmony” (42).

The first to evolve was the Evangelical Javanese Church, *Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa* (GITJ). Its origins, writes Roth, are hazy: did it begin with the arrival of Jansz, or the first ordination in 1929 (a full seventy-five years after the first baptism), or with the formation of the synod in 1940? Parenthetically, the synod structure may seem peculiarly Indonesian, but reflects the Mennonite idea of congregational independence; the synod is a mere advisory council that deals with institutional cohesion.

The church conference grew, even while Mennonite Mission was reluctant to cede control to the locals, though the latter were increasingly educated and sophisticated. Indonesian Mennonites resisted, however, and in 1940, wishing to engage in a war of independence against their Dutch overlords, voted to disavow the Mennonite tradition of nonresistance. A Mennonite missionary from Switzerland, Daniel Amstutz, resigned



Holy Stadium in Semarang.

Photo source: <https://factsofindonesia.com/most-largest-churches-in-indonesia>

in protest. After World War II ended, though, he helped convince the church to remain in the Mennonite fold. In the years following, conflict exploded in the GITJ. It was only resolved after reconciliation efforts in 2000. Currently, the GITJ embraces women in leadership and espouses ethnic diversity.

The GITJ remains predominantly rural to this day. The second conference, or synod, to develop, was the mostly urban Muria Christian Church of Indonesia, Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI). (Mount Muria is a dormant volcano in northern Java.) It was, in its early years, primarily ethnic Chinese. In 1925, Tee Siem Tat, an entrepreneur, and his wife, Sie Djoen Nio, organized a Mennonite congregation without the knowledge of Mennonite Mission. This congregation, the first non-European Mennonite church, would develop over time into GKMI. Its survival and eventual success, however, were not originally due to any kind of cooperation from Mennonite Mission. When Tee Siem Tat asked to be ordained, he was turned down. He did not hesitate to break from the Mennonite church and begin his own congregation. Conflict naturally ensued; in fact, breakaway congregations developed within GKMI itself.

World War II and the Japanese occupation brought great suffering to some Indonesian Mennonites. The Japanese seemed to look the other way when a youthful Muslim terror group, Ansor, perpetrated acts of brutality upon Christians, especially ethnic Chinese. The end of the war meant a new beginning for GKMI. In 1948, a synod was formed to organize the churches. Mennonite Central Committee workers arrived in Indonesia, and recognized an opportunity to help. MCC assisted



Adi & Ruth Sutanto.

Photo source: <https://gramhir.com/explore-hashtag/adisutanto>

“In 1948, a synod was formed to organize the churches. Mennonite Central Committee workers arrived in Indonesia, and recognized an opportunity to help.”

potential leaders to pursue education in the United States. GKMI chose to remain in the Mennonite orbit, although, like other Mennonite churches in Indonesia, it did not stress denominational distinctives. “Today,” writes John Roth, “GKMI is one of the few explicitly interethnic churches in all of Indonesia” (130).

The third Indonesian synod is altogether different from the first two. The Indonesian Christian Congregation, Jemaat Kristen Indonesia (JKI), has its origins in a charismatic youth revival of the 1960s—as well as out

of divisions in the GKMI synod. Years later, a gifted student, Adi Sutanto, felt a nostalgia for the passion of that charismatic revival. He studied at various Mennonite colleges and seminaries in the United States and earned his PhD. On his return to Indonesia in 1976, he started a house fellowship in Semarang. His intention was to revive charismatic worship but interest in social issues soon followed. Many Mennonite church officials were skeptical as to the organizing skills of these new church planters, and they were correct insofar as charismatic worship by its very nature conflicts with institution building.

Sutanto and his colleagues persisted. Their intentions

to plant five hundred small fellowships nosedived, but only because megachurches seemed to form spontaneously. Congregations in Semarang, where the Mennonite World Conference will take place, number in the thousands, and the largest congregation, Jakarta Praise Community

Church, located in Indonesia’s capital city, has eighteen thousand members. The JKI, as it eventually became known, took on a synod structure that is quite loose—any congregation (within reason)

seeking legal status can join the JKI. The conference thus lacks any clear Anabaptist-Mennonite identity. As Adi Sutanto argued in his PhD thesis, however, the JKI must find its own way. The charismatic character of JKI, signs and wonders and speaking in tongues, he wrote, connects with ancient Indonesian folkways and affirms the indigenous nature of the church.

At the 2009 Mennonite World Conference in Asunción, Paraguay, representatives from all three Indonesian synods met, and were mildly surprised to discover that they shared commonalities. What better way to strengthen this burgeoning sense of unity, they decided, than to sponsor a Mennonite World Conference at the JKI Holy Stadium in Semarang? Inter-Menno meetings ensued, and it is hoped that the Conference can still take place despite COVID.

John Roth notes what he sees as four major difficulties facing the three Indonesian synods. Christian-Muslim interaction can be problematic, although so far relationships have been respectful; Anabaptist-Mennonite identity is hazy, sometimes non-existent; inter-Mennonite cooperation may be difficult after years of conflict; and honouring the elderly while ushering in the young might present a challenge.

For those who personally wish to attend the Conference in Semarang, Roth provides an appendix with tips on travel and sightseeing. And for those who have no particular interest in Indonesian church history, Indonesian recipes such as fried rice, steamed salted duck egg, brown chicken stew with lime, and mixed vegetables with peanut sauce are appended.

Tribute to Harold Ratzlaff

We have lost another friend at Mennonite Historical Society and Mennonite Heritage Museum. Harold Ratzlaff, who frequently directed film showings at the Museum, died September 6, 2021.

Harold's wide-ranging knowledge was always on display in his talks. He had an impressive résumé. Harold earned several degrees and worked forty-five years as an educator, the last twenty as a professor at the University of British Columbia. He served on the boards of Frasersview, Killarney and Bakerview Mennonite Brethren churches; as a director on the board of Columbia Bible College; as a member of the Mennonite Faith and Learning Society; on the Senate at Regent College; as vice-chair of the

Mennonite Brethren Board of Higher Education; and as a member of the Royal Commission on Education.

After his retirement, Harold travelled with his wife, Viola, for nine successive years to teach at Lithuania Christian College.

Talented as he was, Harold will be remembered for his quiet kindness. He was born in 1932 in Acme, Alberta, and completed his teacher training in that province. In 1959, he married Viola Doerksen, with whom he had three sons. The Ratzlaff home was a loving one. His thoughtful presence is keenly missed by the family to whom he was so devoted, as well as by the "family" of volunteers at the

Society and Museum.



Harold Ratzlaff.
Photo: Abbotsford News

And Goodbye to Al Wall

Al Wall was a quiet and thoughtful presence at the Mennonite Historical Society of BC. He was always easy to work with, and a joy in conversation—ideas flowed; suggestions on projects; new slants on issues, personalities, history. He was tenacious in identifying individuals in archival photographs, and focused and knowledgeable in his work with maps.

A fellow volunteer writes, "He was very good at

talking to people and coaxing stories out of them. I loved his sense of humour and appreciated his passion for and thoroughness of his work."

Al Wall was born in 1950 and died on



Al Wall.
MHSBC files

December 18, 2021. He left this life while his family sang, "Soon and very soon we are going to see the king."

We at the Society will deeply miss him and will feel the void.

The Yarrow Research Committee Publications

Harvey Neufeld: August 27, 1936-December 28, 2021

In early 1999, Harvey Neufeldt confided to me that he and our uncle, Professor Jacob Loewen, had been in discussions about a possible new project, a history of early Yarrow, British Columbia, a hamlet of Dutch and German Mennonite refugees from the USSR. Harvey wondered if I might be interested in serving as editor of what he assumed would be a volume featuring a number of essays written by contributors with direct connections to early Yarrow. Although I said no to Harvey's invitation, Harvey spent a year trying to change my mind, and he ultimately succeeded in doing so, especially after he informed me that he would serve as coordinator of the project. Under Harvey's extraordinary supervision, the Yarrow Research Committee, a group of some twelve scholars, produced five volumes in the years 2002 to 2009. Harvey not only oversaw the writing of all five volumes but also served as editor of the third and fourth volumes, contributed chapters to the first four volumes, and the introduction



Dr. Harvey Neufeldt.

www.crowderfuneralhome.com/obituaries

to the fifth. He also created a family fund to help underwrite the work of the Yarrow Research Committee.

The five volumes of the Yarrow Research Committee are as follows (in chronological order):

Before We Were the Land's. Horsdal and Schubart, Victoria, British Columbia, 2002.

Village of Unsettled Yearnings. Horsdal and Schubart, Victoria, British Columbia, 2002.

First Nations and First Settlers in the Fraser Valley (1890-1960). Pandora Press, Kitchener, Ontario, 2004.

Windows to a Village: Life Studies of Yarrow Pioneers. Pandora Press, Kitchener, Ontario, 2007.

A Generation of Vigilance: The Life and Works of Johannes and Tina Harder. CMU Press, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 2009.

Rest in peace, good and faithful servant and very dear life-long friend.

- Leonard Neufeldt

Roots & Branches

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Your contributions are needed to further this work! All donations will be receipted for tax purposes. Please note that, for reasons of legality, membership fees cannot be receipted for tax purposes. And please consider remembering us in your will.

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The Mennonite Heritage Museum has reopened. The Mennonite Historical Society, due to the COVID pandemic, is open by appointment only.



Winter Dogwood. Drawing by Rebecca M. Jantzen, 2020. See more at <https://rebeccamjantzen.com/>

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Rebecca Jantzen lives on One Love Farm near Lillooet, British Columbia, situated on the traditional and unceded territories of the St'at'imc peoples. Due to the region's hot summer climate, fertile mountain benches and gorgeous geography, I was drawn here, with my farmer husband, to live, farm and raise our two young sons to love nature and farm life.

My family's organic micro-intensive vegetable farm is nestled on the mountain benches of the Fraser Canyon, with views of the mighty Fraser River. Cradled by mountains, our area is home to many wild species of animals and plants: from the mountain goats that can be seen on the tall mountains that look down on us, to the cinnamon-coloured bears that love the soft grass of the meadow nearby. Respect and appreciation for wildlife and the land is a large part of my daily life.

Surrounded by wildlife and the beauty of what we grow on our farm, I create nature-inspired works of art. I aim to capture the invigoration one gets from communing with nature. Most notably, I paint the heart of nature: what we feel and experience within our inner landscapes when viewing and connecting with our natural surroundings.