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

Chris Silver, a council member of Sumas First Nation, speaking by House Post. See story inside: "Reconciliation Walk."

Photo used by permission

The Riel House National Historic Site, Winnipeg, MB.

Photo credit: Julia M. Toews, 2012.

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Editorial

By Robert Martens

Many Mennonites arrived in British Columbia as refugees, fleeing the genocidal Soviet Union. Trauma was common, and may have been passed down to future generations through a process called "epigenetics." Mennonites, however, settled in Canada on land originally occupied by the Indigenous, a people affected to this day by generations of displacement, even genocide.

The Indigenous question is fraught with controversy. Nevertheless, in this issue, we are asking, what has the relationship been between Mennonites and the Indigenous? It's a complex history, a problem without clear answers. We are presenting here a few observations – conclusions are perhaps impossible. It's important, though, to question our own responsibility in the matter. Otherwise, we may be aligning ourselves with the expert in the law who, when told by Jesus to love his neighbour, responded with evasion, "But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29)

MHSBC is a community-funded organization, and we need your help. Every year, all memberships conclude December 31, and are renewable in January. They are then effective for the full year. We urge you to renew, and thank you for your past support.

Errata

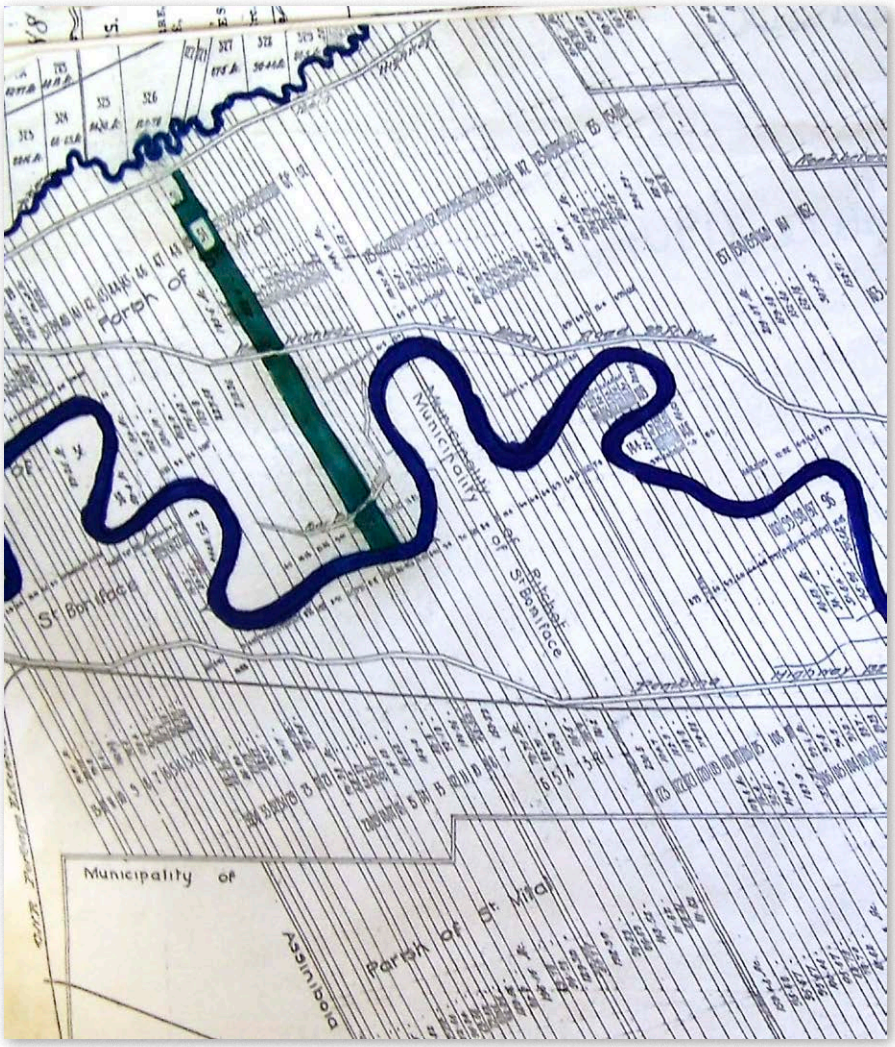
David F. Loewen writes: Photo caption on page 14 of Vol. 29, No. 1, Roots and Branches, Feb. 2023, should read "...second row from the back, 4th from the right."

Mennonites and the Indigenous: "All My Relations"

■ By Robert Martens

An independent people, earning their own way and harming no one: historically, Mennonites have often identified themselves along these lines. In truth, however, Mennonites have not lived in isolation. They have sometimes displaced native populations, even as they themselves were frequently displaced. Swiss Mennonites occupied Indigenous territories on the North American east coast during the early years of colonialism. After the American Revolution, Loyalist Mennonites fled north into Canada, where they once again occupied Native lands. In South Russia, Mennonites moved into territory that was previously home to nomadic peoples such as the Cossacks and Nogais.

Mennonite attitudes towards the Indigenous have not typically been overtly hostile, but neither have they been consistently supportive or empathetic.



Metis land was divided according to the seigneurial system of New France, based on long, narrow river lots. Each lot was up to 3 km deep with a river frontage of 150-250 metres. Photo source: Riel House National Historic Site, Winnipeg, MB. Photo credit: Julia Toews, 2012.

A war against nature

In the 1870s, thousands of Russian Mennonites left Russia for both the United States and Canada, fleeing increasing government control over their customary way of life. They were welcomed, in Canada, by a colonialist government intent on developing the land as quickly as possible in an effort to prevent American expansion northwards. In 1877, Governor-General Lord Dufferin met with Mennonites on the East Reserve in Manitoba. He invited Canadian Mennonites to participate in a "war waged against the brute forces of nature." Manitoban Mennonites had endured major hardships when they settled, and were understandably grateful for Dufferin's words of support. In this so-called war against nature, however, Native understandings of the world as a single harmonious being were considered irrelevant. Worse, Dufferin did not even acknowledge Native existence. Mennonites, he declared, had built their farms and villages on "absolutely bare, desolate and untenanted prairie" (qtd. in Wiebe 111).

Two solitudes?

At the very moment that Métis in the Canadian prairies were requesting that the government allocate to them their traditional territories, the first wave of Russian Mennonites were settling those very lands. Government policy was clearly racial – Europeans were considered more beneficial to Canada's development than the Indigenous – but it was also economic, since Mennonites, given their centuries of experience in agriculture, would presumably farm prairie land more efficiently than the Métis.

Historians have sometimes reported that Mennonites

and Métis lived side by side, but mostly in isolation from the other. This is very likely false. From the start of immigration into the East and West Reserves, Mennonites were being informed of their neighbours. Jacob Shantz wrote in an immigration pamphlet of "half-breeds" who are "a civilized group of people," and he acknowledged that they had legitimate grievances (Wiebe 115). After settlement, prairie Mennonites had numerous face-to-face encounters with the Métis, described them in their diaries, employed them, and sometimes even came to their defence. Mennonites and Métis cooperated on fire protection, with Mennonites apparently respecting Métis authority over their own lands.

During and after the Métis Uprising of 1885, the *Rundschau*, then under the editorship of American John F. Harms, published numerous stories on Louis Riel and his armed forces. Points of view on the Uprising crossed the spectrum, but tended towards support for the government. In one story, though, "Indian agents" were roundly denounced as corrupt.

Governor James Douglas.
Photo source: Wikipedia Commons.

Lady Amelia Douglas.
Photo source: Wikipedia Commons

Louis Riel was captured and summarily hanged by the Canadian government, and Métis grievances went largely unaddressed. Mennonite support for the authorities may be partially explained by the fact that in the 1880s they were transitioning from a communal to a more individualistic lifestyle, and so were increasingly concerned about property rights. Prairie Mennonites may have often had a decent relationship with their Métis neighbours, but they carried with them a European sense of superiority over the Indigenous, "non-productive" inhabitants of the land.

A new colony on the west coast

The situation for Mennonites in British Columbia was markedly different from that of the immigration stream of the 1870s in the prairies. The 1920s stream of Mennonites did not leave Russia by choice: they were refugees.

When European settlers arrived on Canada's west coast, the Indigenous had lived in its forests and along its rivers and ocean shores for thousands of years. Their lifestyle was completely, or nearly so, sustainable. The British, aiming to halt American expansion, had established a modest governmental foothold on the west coast but the Gold Rush of 1858 changed the situation dramatically. American prospectors were flooding across the border in the hope of striking it rich. Conflict between the Indigenous and the invading gold miners inevitably followed.

To maintain order, the Crown Colony of British Columbia was established at the time of the 1858 Gold Rush. The beginnings held some promise for the Indigenous. The Colony's first governor, James Douglas, who was born to a Creole woman in Guyana and married a Métis woman, was fairly sympathetic to the troubles of the Indigenous, who were beginning to be overrun by European settlers. The reserve lands Douglas set aside were reasonably large. All hopes for justice for the Indigenous vanished, however, when Joseph Trutch served as lieutenant-governor after BC joined Confederation in 1871. A racist to the core, Trutch reduced reserve lands to the point where they were unlivable.

A lake vanishes

In the Fraser Valley, Sumas Lake, called Semá:th X̲o:tsa by the natives, was considered an impediment by European settlers. The lake seemed a never-ending source of abundance for the local Stó:lō, but its annual flooding was a hindrance to sustained agriculture. Additionally, the lake was host each year to mosquitoes in such numbers that a Sumas reeve remarked, "the air is so full of them, some of them are obliged to walk" (qtd. in Foulds & Gough 39).

The draining of Sumas Lake became a real possibility. In 1912, the McKenna-McBride Commission was called together to discuss reserve lands in BC. Also on the table was the draining of Sumas Lake. Chief Selesmlton (Ned) of the Semá:th Band spoke against the proposed

project. "I am against the dyking because that will mean more starvation for us. Because the lake is one of the greatest spawning grounds there is and this dyking would cut it off and in that way it would cut off our fish supply" (qtd. in Foulds & Gough 40).

The objections were ignored, and the draining of Sumas Lake went ahead. The project was finished in 1922. The source of hunting and fishing for the Indigenous vanished seemingly overnight. Elder Ray Silver remarked in a 2008 interview, "They're going to drain the lake? So, they thought the white men were just dreaming…. I don't know how long later, and they looked and the lake was going dry…. It was too late then!" (qtd. in Foulds & Gough 41)

Two traumatized peoples

Russian Mennonite refugees first arrived in the Fraser Valley in the late 1920s. Many were fleeing the harsh climate and lonely lifestyle on the Canadian prairies where they first settled, founding the village of Yarrow in 1929, structuring it like a typical Russian Mennonite village. In the Abbotsford area, two large parcels of land were allotted to the incoming refugee settlers in the 1930s. As hard-working agriculturalists and labourers, Mennonites were useful to the authorities despite racism, anti-German sentiment, and condescension to these "dirty immigrants."

Though both Russian Mennonites and the Indigenous were traumatized by war, or disease, or abuse, Mennonites had the advantage in of European descent – they eventually could "fit in."

Meeting the stranger

Mennonite-Indigenous encounters in this context were stumbling at best. Mennonites barely knew the people whose land now gave them shelter. In the following story, Thelma Reimer Kauffman vividly describes the meeting of two alien cultures:

"The most mysterious, chaotic and exciting time of hop picking came when we finished picking a field. In those hours, two communities would meet in the middle of the field, each having worked from opposite ends. As young pickers, we were not only excited at the prospect of that day; we were also a little frightened.

"About a week before finishing up a field, some brave and curious soul would venture out and run what seemed to be a mile or more in the rough dirt to the end of the row to find out who the pickers were. Perhaps they would be other Mennonites from such communities as Chilliwack, Abbotsford, or Greendale. Sometimes cousins from another community revealed the group's identity. Seldom would the explorer find people he knew from his own community. As a rule, once each season there were pickers at the other end of the row who were different from us, and then the explorer would come back and breathlessly say, 'There are Indians at the other end!'

"'Indians!'

"The rumour would spread like wildfire, and soon other pickers would steal time away from their picking and run up the row to see for themselves. Once I, too, overcome by curiosity, went to look at the strangers. There they were, in long dresses, with shawls and scarves, yet otherwise much like ourselves. How embarrassing to suddenly come face to face with a Native woman quietly picking behind a hop vine at the other end of your row. In order not to appear too nosy or wide-eyed or open-mouthed, I had to pretend I was looking for something or going somewhere, even as I observed all I could. Then I heard one of them speak, and the language was unintelligible. Imagine that. I, who could speak German, Low German, and English, could not understand a word these people were speaking. What would the finishing day be like?

"Closer and closer, day by day, the two groups moved toward each other. Then one day it finally happened – they merged. Pickers in one row met, and that row was done. Now they all went to work in the longest rows remaining. Perhaps the pickers in those rows had missed a day or quit altogether. Perhaps they were just slow. As more and more rows were finished, more people swarmed together to pick the last vines. Soon there was such a buzz and jumble of people and baskets and belongings that every bit of alertness and intelligence was required to know what to do next. Children got lost and began to cry. Lunches and coats had to be protected and collected before the row was done. The hops you had picked needed to be weighed, and by the right weigh-up person. In all the confusion, you didn't dare lose your own partners or the larger group to which you belonged, or you'd end up on the wrong truck, with no way to get home.

"Imagine how complicated things got when we Mennonites picked our way smack up against another

Large group of First Nations Hop Pickers in Hop Field c. 1895-1897. At their own request, they were segregated from non-aboriginals in order to allow for the preservation of their culture.

Photo credit: James O. Booen. Courtesy of the Chilliwack Museum & Archives (P1622).

culture. One minute you'd be busy and safe in your own row, and the next, a Stó:lō man would set his basket next to yours and tear down the neighbouring vine. Few words, if any, were spoken. Indians, as we referred to them, were assumed to be the silent type, and the silence was catching. You could almost hear each other breathe. Children gawked, and grown-ups did their share of stealthy staring amidst all the disorder. Sad to say, we seldom came away from the experience any wiser or more understanding. It was, in fact, a big muddle of culture shock that gave us only an awareness of another and very different world next to us" (Reimer Kauffman 181-2).

And where from here?

Native populations were essentially ignored, sidelined, or actively mistreated in Canada. Mennonite refugees who arrived after World War II stepped into a society where the Indigenous were kept out of sight, and expected to adapt to mainstream culture. Traumatized Mennonites have adapted, and thrived, but Native populations still often suffer from a history of abuse. How can Mennonites contribute to healing or reconciliation? Action is essential, but understanding is a crucial first step. Mennonites have a long history of community and mutual support behind them. Perhaps they can appreciate the Indigenous phrase, "All my relations," often spoken in ceremony, prayer, or otherwise. All of us, related, in this world, together.

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Mennonite Residential Schools in Canada

By Robert Martens

For over a century, the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central part of this policy, which can be best described as "cultural genocide" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, qtd. in Siegrist 6).

A scarcely known fact: Mennonites administered three Indigenous residential schools in Canada, writes scholar and minister Anthony Siegrist in a 2018 *Mennonite Quarterly Review* article. They functioned between 1960 and 1991; all were in Ontario; and none of the three was officially an arm of any Mennonite church. Nevertheless, they were run by Mennonites, in this case the more "conservative" wing of the American east coast.

These schools were virtually forgotten – outside of former staff and students – until they were named in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report of 2015. They were part of the residential school system, writes Siegrist, but not government-initiated, and had their own Mennonite-influenced character. He contends that staff at these schools were neither heroes nor villains.

Anthony Siegrist Photo source: bakerpublishinggroup.com

Entrenching colonialism

Before Canada was officially a nation, relationships between settlers and Aboriginals were based on trade and military alliances. Agrarianism changed all that. The skills of the Indigenous – their military prowess, understanding of nature, trapping and hunting expertise – were now irrelevant to European colonists. A decision was made in Ottawa to assimilate the original inhabitants into mainstream Canada. This involved "educating" them into a Western way of life – and residential schools were born.

Education could not be administered, said Prime Minister John A. MacDonald in 1883, on reservations where children would be "surrounded by savages." Native children should be placed in "central training industrial schools" so that they might "acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men" (qtd. in 7). Duncan Campbell Scott, deputy minister of Indian Affairs (and also a fine poet) said in 1920 that the government must aim to "get rid of the Indian problem" and "continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic" (qtd. in 7).

An arrangement was made with the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches to oversee Native residential schools. These churches already had experience in administering schools. Additionally, teaching staff would cost very little, since church members were often willing to work for a pittance.

Perhaps there were "good intentions" involved, but the results were calamitous. Residential schools in Canada lasted for over one hundred years, with eighty institutions providing space for about 150,000 children. Of that student total, approximately three thousand died during their residency: an astounding one out of fifty. Many perished, writes Siegrist, "as "the result of disease to which overcrowding and malnutrition made them particularly susceptible" (8).

The evidence is contradictory, but the three Mennonite residential schools in question may not have dealt out abuse in a way that many schools did. Humanitarian impulses played a role in Mennonite residential school outreach. "Good intentions," though, if such they were, proved deadly. Natives have recently denounced these schools in scathing terms, and apologies from their administrators have been issued.

The Northern Light Gospel Mission

In 1938, Pennsylvania-born Irwin Schantz began mission work in northern Minnesota. His labours continued through World War II, during which he wrote to American Mennonite supporters, "We are under the watchful eye of God and the F.B.I., who are concerned about the young men to see if they are draft dodgers"

(qtd. in 13). Schantz took his activities northward into Ontario after the war, and in 1950 his organization became formally known at the romantic-sounding Northern Light Gospel Mission (NLGM). Three years later, the Mission built a station near Pikangikum, a reserve near the mining town of Red Lake, Ontario. Mission activities became increasingly sophisticated: Irwin Schantz himself earned a pilot's licence and flew float planes. Many years later, the *Winnipeg Free Press* would refer to this band of gospel adventurers as the "Mennonite Air Force" (14).

Members of the village of Poplar Hill, some forty kilometres north of Pikangikum, were curious about the new arrivals, and NLGM workers agreed to meet with them. Poplar Hill already had a church presence, however, in the form of an itinerant Roman Catholic priest, and a minor battle of the churches began. The Natives of Poplar Hill may have felt a greater bond with the strange conservative group of Mennonites, who showed more interest in social welfare issues, "a better way of life," as one staff member articulated (qtd. in 14). One example was a project aimed at better preserving the fishermen's catch for shipment to market.

The Mission was, at its core, paternalistic. In a 1954 letter, Schantz described the Indigenous traditional ceremonies and the lack of furniture and utensils. Could his readers, he asked, see "why life is so meaningless to these people?" (qtd. in 14). And yet NLGM Mennonite missionaries, perhaps influenced by their own conservative "unworldly" background, sensed the creep of modern-world encroachment as dangerous. In the 1950s and early 1960s, traditional Indigenous lifestyles were being lost, and Canadian business was quick to step in and take advantage. An individual who worked as a shopkeeper in northern Ontario contends that this was when "the north fell apart" (qtd. in 15).

Irwin & Susan Schantz.
Photo source: GAMEO.

Poplar Hill, the first Mennonite residential school

The NLGM identified a social crisis among the Indigenous, and began setting up provisional educational facilities in a perhaps misconceived effort to address the issues. Another Pennsylvanian, Clair

Poplar Hill Residential School.
Photo Source: *Canadian Mennonite*, Aug. 26, 2010, Vol. 14, Issue 16.
From *A Brief History of Northern Light Gospel Mission*, Mary Horst, 1977

Schnupp, who would become the first principal of the Poplar Hill Residential School, wrote in 1959, "I'm slowly readjusting to life in the North Country and also finding it a real challenge to conduct another summer of school for these dear, intelligent, but often unwanted, under privileged Indian children…. This is the fourth summer for a seasonal school here at Poplar Hill. Both the Indians and the government want us to start a regular winter school" (qtd. in 16).

And indeed a winter school was organized by the Mission in 1960. Poplar Hill Residential School – later the Poplar Hill Development School – started with a few students, soon added thirty more, and in time was swamped with applications. The government moved some students from overburdened schools to Poplar Hill, and paid, initially, $1 a day for their room and board. "The Mennonite school was becoming part of the [governmental] residential school system" (16).

Unquestionably, children were forced into unwanted situations, but the evidence remains unclear what role the NLGM played in this. Requests for Poplar Hill enrolment were sometimes formal, often very informal. For example, a 1974 request for admission reads, "Dear Sir, We would like to have our son Timothy … to attend your school this coming term. We find it difficult here to have him to attend school regularly. We are from

Pikangikum. We would like very much to have him go to school at Poplar Hill" (qtd. in 19).

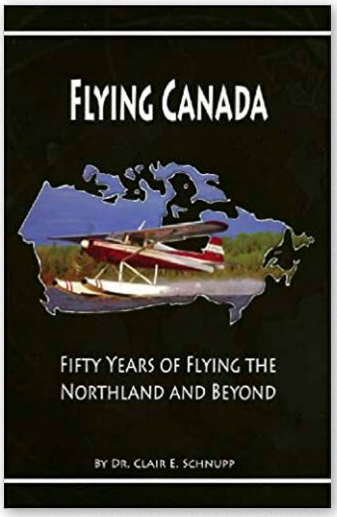
Concern was growing over conditions Indigenous students were facing when they attended high school in urban areas. In 1971, Chief Jacob Fiddler of Sandy Lake wrote to Poplar Hill principal Paul Miller, requesting the establishment of a local high school. "I think they could get along better in a school in the bush than in a city, away from their parents" (qtd. in 19). Poplar Hill added a high school, and by 1980 counted about eighty students.

Controversy and collapse: the end of Poplar Hill

Trouble lay ahead. Principal Paul Miller may have intuited this when he wrote, "[W]e want to avoid the mistake of operating a program on the basis of needs which existed, perhaps, ten years ago" (qtd. in 20). The Poplar Hill School came into conflict with the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council (NNEC), founded in 1978-79 to represent the interests of the Indigenous in schools in northwestern Ontario. Problems may have begun in the 1970s, when rumours circulated concerning harsh corporal punishment at Poplar Hill. In 1978 a provincial police officer investigated the school, concluding that corporal punishment there was not out of line, but criticizing the opening and censoring of mail by school staff – clearly an abusive practice.

The school principal responded by writing, "It seems more and more we are being held accountable to the people we are serving and I believe that is right" (qtd. in 22). Still, corporal punishment continued at Poplar Hill, and though the practice was banned nationally only in 2004, the school fell under heavy criticism, lost NNEC funding in 1989, and closed then for good.

Even after the announcement of school closure, the storm continued, with the *Winnipeg Free Press* claiming that children were bent over a table when they were strapped, and their arms held in place with such force that they bruised. The NLGM denied the claims and hired a lawyer, but refused, as conservative Mennonites, to take the issue to court. The *Free Press* accusations were supported by some students, refuted by others, but there is no doubt that harsh corporal punishment took place. During an ensuing provincial police investigation, no survivors wished to press charges. The controversy, however, irreparably harmed the reputation of the NLGM; it changed its name, and then finally closed. The Native churches the Mission had established, on the other hand, have survived.



A one-man show: two new residential schools

Clair Schnupp, the first principal at Poplar Hill, was a force to be reckoned with. He and his wife, Clara, left the school after disputes with staff made his presence there untenable. A colleague later wrote that he left an "undesirable spirit in his wake" (qtd. in 27). For a time, Schnupp continued working with Northern Light Gospel Mission but ultimately that was not enough: he launched an independent Mennonite mission agency, at first an informal organization, but eventually officially recognized as Northern Youth Programs (NYP).

Clair Schnupp. Photo source: EMU.edu/now/crossroads

NYP was quite different from previous efforts, in that its goals were not to establish Mennonite churches. "This approach," writes Siegrist, "shows an awareness of Mennonite cultural peculiarity, in that they were willing to support Indigenous people without making them Mennonites…" (26). On the other hand, since Schnupp's organization was independent, supported only by an ad hoc group of Mennonite congregations and individuals, it lacked accountability. Northern Youth Programs was dominated by Clair Schnupp's brash entrepreneurial drive.

No doubt the man had talent. He soon expanded his organization eastward to Quebec, and as far as Alaska and Greenland. But Schnupp is remembered by colleagues with mixed emotions. He was described by an interviewee as a "fiery horse" with "huge flaws." "The

man would ride roughshod over others and not know it, yet he could also 'fire up people by the busload' and excelled at recruiting volunteers" (qtd. in 27).

Clair Schnupp and his organization founded two Native residential schools in Stirland Lake, Ontario: Wahbon Bay Academy, a boys' school, begun in 1971; and Cristal Lake, a school for girls, in 1976. The two amalgamated in 1986 as Stirland Lake High School. Limited government funding indicated that the school relied to some degree on the state.

Schnupp's driving concern was over the degradation awaiting many Aboriginals when they left their northern reserves for high school in urban centres. His own traditionalist background may have increased his sensitivity to the problem. "The present trend," he wrote, "is for hundreds of these young folks to leave the seclusion of the family log cabins in the north-woods and end up in the cheap Chinese cafes on the lower side of the towns and cities with the dope, liquor, prostitution, etc." (qtd. in 28) His beliefs brought him into conflict with government. In 1969 he wrote, "We are not convinced that the government policy of bringing so many young folks south and the policy of forced integration is correct. Neither are the Indian parents" (qtd. in 28). Schnupp went so far as to photograph conditions on the streets of Thunder Bay to prove his point. A government bureaucrat protested, "We wish this propaganda to stop immediately!! We have our own interpretation of why this is going on" (qtd. in 29).

An associate of Schnupp's, a houseparent living in Thunder Bay, corroborated what Schnupp had found on the streets and wrote a report, "Indian Young People At School in Thunder Bay, Their Predicament as I See It." In it he wrote, "[T]hese people are not the cause of the degeneration of their young people – and it is these same people that are being asked to trust their children into the hands of people that seemingly feel that no matter what the outcome of life in the city on a young person, it is still better than being at home on reserve" (qtd. in 30). The report was sent to the Department of Indian Affairs, which threatened to sue.

Another controversy, another collapse

Siegrist writes, "What mission leaders did not fully appreciate was the fact that in the early 1970s many church and government officials had finally realized that the residential school model was a failure on just about every front, a fact that had long been obvious to the First Nations" (32). The Stirland Lake School tried to prolong its survival by appointing an Aboriginal to an advisory position. It was in vain. First, financing seemed to be a perennial problem. Additionally, Stirland Lake was accused, like Poplar Hill, by the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council, Poplar Hill's nemesis, of harsh corporal punishment. And then the "Stirland incident" – surely a euphemism – took place.

On March 2, 1987, when staff discovered male and female students together in a dormitory and ordered them to part, students resisted. Staff were hit with hockey sticks or whatever was at hand. Police were called – surely a grossly inappropriate reaction. After an incident of this magnitude, which signalled that the institution was guilty of serious missteps and/or human rights violations, NYP board members decided it could no longer engage in "long term custodial care" for Indigenous youth. The school struggled on for a few more years but folded in 1991.

Regrets

Apologies for the residential school system ensued. In 1997 the Northern Light Gospel Mission issued a statement, asserting that its staff "generally acted in good faith," but conveying "regret for any hurtful experiences which members of the First Nations communities may have felt" (qtd. in 36).

Clair Schnupp's apology was more emotional. In a letter to Jimmy Morris, deputy grand chief of the Nishanawbe Aski First Nation, he wrote, "We regret that we were drawn into the White Establishment's residential school system even though it was at the request of the parents…. If only we would have had the insight that Native people should have administrated the school, but we didn't…. Looking back with all we hear of pain, hurt, misunderstanding and bitterness due to the cultural differences, naivety, rules, discipline, and mistakes, we conclude that the pain, hurt, misunderstanding and bitterness outweigh the good accomplished. If only we could do it over again … but we can't. We can only apologize and ask forgiveness" (qtd. in 36).

The United Church had issued an apology for its part in the residential school system in 1986. It would not be until 2008 that Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized on behalf of the Canadian nation.

Conclusions

Anthony Siegrist admits that he is not an unaffected observer. "I spent the early years of my childhood at two of these schools as the son of residential staff. I can, if only vaguely, remember some of the people and places mentioned…" (12). He also admits that he would write his article differently today, although he is unsure what exactly he would change.

It is up to the reader to decide whether his conclusions are reasonable. "Though the individuals and institutions in this story cannot be labeled as heroes of mission and humanitarian service, neither can they be rightly described as malicious actors in the residential school narrative" (6).

Source

Siegrist, Anthony G. "'Part of the Authority Structure': An Organizational History of Mennonite Indian Residential Schools in Ontario." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 93 (Jan. 2019): 5-38. https://anthonysiegrist.com/2021/07/09/mennonites-and-residential-schools-in-ontario/

In Search of Freddie Sasakamoose. Who? "Call Me Indian."

■ By Bill Thiessen

On November 24, 2020, around 1 pm (BC time), Freddie succumbed to the COVID-19 virus after only four days of hospitalization in Prince Albert. He had met with an inadvertent carrier (asymptomatic), leading to illness and his rapid departure.

The death practically coincided with the death of another friend, deepening the effect of recent losses of friends. All had left a mark on my life – an indelible memory.

Freddie was one such a friend, an uncommon friend, with strong Aboriginal roots. You may wonder: how might I with "Anabaptist-Mennonite" roots have developed a bond with him? Let me tell the story.

Fred Sasakamoose and I were practically compatriots, without our knowledge; he was eight months my senior in terms of age. Our paths were quite divergent, and yet both were modest. However, in his early life, particularly in residential school, he faced abuse and disrespect; I did not.

Our paths converged during one game of hockey in Waldheim. I had been recruited by the Waldheim Warriors for their annual spring hockey tournament, and Freddie was recruited by the Duck Lake Indians. I had been goaltender with RJC (Rosthern Junior College) Vets (alumni), having completed my second year, and was deemed qualified to be recruited. Freddie had been "recruited" from the Chicago Blackhawks, who had just been defeated in their NHL playoff run. His position, with his blistering, accurate shot, was devastating left wing.

We did not meet; we only faced each other on ice numerous times. Even to this day the memory of handsome Freddie, with slick black hair, coming up the ice – again and again – on left wing, is etched in my memory. I can readily conjure up the pucks coming at me – again and again.

Fred Sasakamoose
Photo supplied by Bill Thiessen.

During the sixth, and second last, TRC (Truth and Reconciliation) event, at the PNE grounds in Vancouver in September 2013, which Marianne and I attended, I was preoccupied with "Finding Freddie." While Marianne, in her dignified and respectful manner, was listening to stories of pain experienced by Aboriginal people, I excused myself, every now and then, with my primary pursuit. I was not sure he was around; I only knew he would be "dropping the puck" at the evening Vancouver Giants junior hockey game, for which I also obtained tickets.

"All my relations" is the Indigenous theme on which I rested. "Somebody" – a relative – will know if he is somewhere on the sprawling PNE grounds. It was an exciting, exhilarating adventure; this was my primary goal! It was my supreme pursuit. I "pulled out all the stops," making numerous valuable connections en route.

"I just saw him," a person at the information booth told me. "I will find him for you. You stay right here." She failed to locate him. After an hour or more, while Marianne and I were studying the replicas of residential

schools, I was called on my cell. "Is this Bill? I am Fred's niece. I will meet you outside the Agrodome."

The niece and Peter, Fred's younger brother, and I met. I was given Fred's cell number and called him. He asked, "Who is this?" in a somewhat curt manner. "Well … I played goal against you." This was the clincher which led to our eventual meeting. We met for about a half hour, maybe more, too short for my load of curiosity questions.

Graciously, he recalled the devastating loneliness he endured; he also implied abuse he faced. St. Michael's Residential School, at Beardy's Reserve in Duck Lake, was situated an hour from Rosthern where I attended RJC. However, he felt no animosity; he had forgiven!

A historical insert: During my year in Grade Twelve, in 1953, at Rosthern Junior College, I played goal for its hockey team in the Regional High School Hockey League. The team was well-laden with talent, resulting in a loss-free year. During the playoffs we faced St. Michael's School in the final game – a game we won. Freddie would have been on the St. Michael's team if he would not have been recruited, at age fifteen, by the Moose Jaw Canucks of the Western Junior Hockey League. He played with the Canucks for four years before his meteoric rise to the NHL with the Chicago Blackhawks.

What sustained him, for the most part, at St. Michael's in Moose Jaw, and during an albeit aborted professional career with Chicago, was his love of hockey, his ever-increasing level of skill, and dogged determination to prove that he could be "as good as the white man" in hockey. This he proved with distinction. It was his extreme loneliness for "home," and his longing for Loretta, his girlfriend and eventual wife, which restrained his love of hockey, and potential professional success.

At the Service of Remembrance, held in the Chief Thunder Stick arena, named in his honour, and located on the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation, Freddie was widely recognized for his contributions. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau honoured him as "a survivor, a trailblazer and community leader." He was a "mighty fine man." His people said, "He made us, the Indigenous Nation, proud." A brother expressed his frustration with Freddie, because he was generously sharing hockey equipment with less fortunate native youth, leaving himself with none. Numerous hockey colleagues regarded him as a hero and model character. He was constantly "giving back," providing encouragement for Indigenous youth, and served as chief for an extended term.

Culminating his achievements, Freddie, with a Grade Six level of formal education, was honoured with the Order of Canada, and an Honorary Doctor of Law from the University of Saskatchewan.

Meeting Fred Sasakamoose at the TRC was a *kairos* moment for me. He gave me an inspirational lift. I am grateful. He will remain etched in my memory.

Now, what is my responsibility? – And yours?

Can we help enrich the Anabaptist perspective and impact of Christian faith with the traditional Indigenous values and relationships? Can the kind of model which Freddie exemplified inspire us?

Fred would have turned eighty-seven on December 25, 2020.

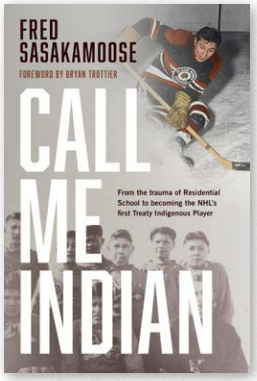
This is a revised, and abbreviated, version of the story.

I have a hockey memory from Waldheim – unrelated to the story. My first two years of teaching were at Waldheim High School (1960-62). I served as coach of the hockey team, which did not lose a single game – and won the championship – during both years! We were the ire of the other teams, especially the Osler High School team, for which Bert Lobe (famous MCCer) was playing goal. This story does NOT "trump" the one about playing against Freddie in the same town and on the same ice rink. (not the same ice!) I have an indelible memory of Freddie coming up the left side of the ice toward me in goal, again and again, with his slick black hair (pre-mask). He looked sharp – and I felt intimidated – in the game in Waldheim in 1955.

Note: The book by Fred Sasakamoose, *Call Me Indian*, was completed only days before his death. The release date was April 2021.

BOOK REVIEW

Fred Sasakamoose. *Call Me Indian: From the Trauma of Residential School to Becoming the NHL's First Treaty Indigenous Player*. **Toronto: Penguin Random House, 2021.**



By Robert Martens

> *Even during the early months I was with George, I knew that the word itself could not insult me. At one point, George made some mention of my being "Native."*
>
> *"Don't call me that," I said. "Call me Indian. That's the name white people gave us hundreds of years ago. You might as well keep using it."*
>
> *"But I didn't want to hurt you, Freddy," he said.*
>
> *"George," I said in return, "*you *could never hurt me."*
>
> *I guess that's what I learned from George, Dave, and my other white friends on the team. The label didn't matter – it was how people treated you that did.* (88-9)

In his memoir, Fred Sasakamoose writes that his goal is to tell his story honestly. He does exactly that, telling a sometimes bleak narrative of appalling abuse at a residential school, a hard growing-up in a world tainted by racism, a brilliant hockey career cut short, of alcoholism, of deaths of family and friends. Despite all that, the book is grounded in a fierce and persistent optimism and a determination always to do the best. Sasakamoose eventually became an honoured leader both within and outside his community.

Some readers might perceive a connection between Mennonite and Indigenous ideals: the love for the land, community, and mutual support. Any connections may end there. Sasakamoose had to endure sufferings and indignities that most contemporary Canadian Mennonites can only imagine.

Fred Sasakamoose never saw the publication of his memoir, having died of COVID complications before that happened. He leaves behind him a legacy, however, in his memoir, and in his work with thousands of children. His was a life well-lived.

Available in bookstores and online.

A Missionary Family's Experience in Northern Manitoba

By Lorne Brandt

All images courtesy of the author

Our father, Edwin Brandt, was a second-generation Canadian, the second son of parents who came from South Russia in 1903. After graduation from Prairie Bible Institute in Three Hills, Alberta, in the spring of 1943, Father, knowing about his call to enlist in Canadian troops during World War II, chose to join other young men who were filling vacancies as teachers and pastors in northern Manitoba as soon as he got his CO (conscientious objector) standing.

Father first taught for eighteen months at an Indian Day School at Island Lake, the area now known as Garden Hill. What was to have been a leave at Easter in 1945 turned into a significant career change. Father wanted now to go back north to work on the mission field, but was told it would be preferred that he were married to serve in that capacity. Fortuitously, he met Margaret Enns from the Burwalde (Winkler) community, where his parents were living. She also had a heart for missions and so they were married. By July they were on their way to serve as a pastor couple in the United Church Mission at Oxford House.

Ed and Margie served here until October 1947, during which time, in 1946, I was born. Of course, I remember nothing of that, but I was told that local people were very curious to see this white baby. Ultimately, the United Church was probably not evangelical enough for my parents, so in 1947 they signed on to work under the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission (NCEM).

In July 1948, NCEM opened a mission in Grand Rapids, Manitoba, under my parents. By this time, I had a sister, Loretta. Three brothers, Leslie, Lloyd and Lowell, were added to the family by 1956. We children enjoyed Sunday school – could our peers sing!

Margie & Ed Brandt in Cree attire, 1945.

Loretta, Les & Lloyd with their Loon Strait friends.

– Christmas concerts at our church and the school, DVBS, birthday parties, boat rides, and picnics.

Nine years later, with non-denominational support waning, and the Manitoba Conference of Mennonites increasingly supporting their own mission, the decision was made to leave NCEM and take up work under the Mennonite Pioneer Mission (MPM), which had been formed in 1948. We were stationed in Loon Straits, on the eastern shore of Lake Winnipeg, where we children had five enjoyable years.

A group of families withdrew from that mission work but that never really affected us children. We swam off the sandy beaches that fronted most homes, played hide-and-seek till after dark, softball, hockey on lake ice, tobogganed, and went on picnics and boat rides with friends and family.

In our teens, we older ones began to enjoy the excitement of coed circle games in the spring, or after-dark potato roasts in snow banks, entertained by the transistor radio I got for Christmas one year. Every summer, we joined, on our own yard, our friends and campers from other settlements in attendance at Loon Straits Bible Camp.

What were my parents' attitudes towards Indigenous People, or Natives/Indians, as they were called at the time? In all my growing-up years, I never heard them say anything negative about them. In fact, I heard positive remarks about their sharing, their generosity, their hospitality. They were honest and trustworthy. One never had to worry about theft. If something went missing, it was simply because someone else had need of it and "borrowed" it. Father also admired how these people could do things like fix their own outboard motors when they gave out on a long trip, with a minimum of tools on hand, let alone real parts.

Our parents never discouraged our friendships with our Indigenous neighbour children. Older neighbour

Playing hockey on Lake Winnipeg ice at Loon Straits.

girls babysat for us and helped Mother with housework. In Grand Rapids, perhaps, because we were younger and there were sometimes dangerous sled dogs on the loose, not to mention the deeply and rapidly flowing Saskatchewan River at the end of our yard, our parents were a little more protective. Even there, though, they let us go out looking for flowers – lady slippers were a prize find – or strawberries. More surprisingly, they let us walk to the garbage dump at the end of the village to see if we could find bears that surfaced there – or did they know that was our aim? In Loon Straits, though, where none of these dangers lurked, we had free rein of the settlement. Besides the pursuits mentioned above, we boys especially loved to explore the forests that surrounded us.

All was not positive, though. In Grand Rapids, our mission work sometimes met stiff opposition from the Anglican and Roman Catholic children. We sometimes received reactions when Father's evangelical sermons had hit home. We experienced ice balls and even stones thrown our way, but all of this, fortunately, was not common. Another thing this writer experienced was the forward female peers pushing and shoving him up against the school wall for a kiss!

Then there were the "deputation visits" to churches "down south" to report on the mission work. We children often felt we were in the spotlight, especially when we got older and our parents decided we could provide "special music." We had to practise appropriate mission-oriented songs and then perform them as a group in front of a congregation! I don't recall our having any strong feelings about that. It was something that went with the territory.

Lorne (back left) & Loretta (back right) with friends in Grand Rapids.

During this time, Father came to see that there was a growing movement of Indigenous people to the city because it was perceived everything came from there – the laws that governed them, the authorities that upheld those laws, that brought them health care and education, even welfare. Everything seemed to be in the cities, so that is where they must go. The ability to maintain traditional lifestyles was diminishing, so there was often little future seen in staying on the reserves up north. At the same time, Father saw the discrimination they faced in the city, the difficulty in navigating the "white man's world." This was the mid-twentieth century, a very different time. Father felt a need to help the Natives in the city whom he had come to love in the north. Thus it was that, in 1962, our family moved to the city, and an urban work began, thus ending our family's seventeen-year sojourn in the north.

A Trip Back to My Roots

■ **By Cheryl Isaac**

A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and cultures is like a tree without roots. (Marcus Garvey)

In September 2022, my daughter Sheri and I took a trip to Europe, stopping first in London (exactly when Queen Elizabeth passed away – another story for another time), and then travelling on to Amsterdam via a train through the Chunnel. I was very excited about going to Amsterdam as I knew that a number of my ancestors had come from Holland.

I feel very fortunate that I can trace my ancestors (on my father's

Cheryl Isaac with Sheri Pohl and their guide Dr. Nina Schroeder.
Photo supplied by author.

side) back to my fourteenth great-grandfather Jakob Harnasveger who was born about 1480-1500 in the Netherlands. My thirteenth great-grandfather Jans De Veer (also known as Janss Gijsbrecht) was born August 11, 1521, in Veere, Zeeland, Netherlands, and his son Gysbert Jansz De Veer, a rich grain merchant, was born May 14, 1556 (same birthday as mine) in Schiedam, Zuid-Holland. Gysbert was married to Debora Claesdochter Harnasveger, who was born in Amsterdam in 1560.

With these ancestors in mind, I hired, on the advice of Richard Thiessen, Dr. Nina Schroeder to take Sheri and me on a walking tour of Amsterdam, focusing on Mennonite history. She is an Art Historian and Researcher/Lecturer in Mennonite History at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. Nina is also a granddaughter of William Schroeder (co-author of the *Mennonite Historical Atlas*). I certainly was not disappointed with our choice of a tour guide.

Nina was such a delight – she gave us a very informative and interesting history of the Anabaptist movement and of Mennonite involvement in the movement. She showed us a couple of the Mennonite hidden churches (in particular the Singelkerk), and also various *hofjes* (obscure courtyards filled with greenery) in the city. In addition, Nina pointed out houses and sites related to different Mennonite merchants, publishers, and authors. These were all located along Amsterdam's beautiful canal belt.

Amsterdam is a very interesting city. It goes back to the year 1275 and was at one time the biggest and one of the richest cities of the world. Until around 1700, it was a leading centre for finance and diamonds. It was known for its religious tolerance and many people were drawn there for this reason. Amsterdam has a hundred kilometres of canals, ninety islands and fifteen hundred bridges. Hundreds of houseboats line the canals and many residents still rely on the bicycle for transportation. Of particular interest to me, I found out that Catholicism dominated Dutch religion until the early sixteenth century; at that point, the Protestant Reformation took the upper hand and was seen as a threat to the royal government. Anabaptism (of which Mennonites became part) grew out of the sixteenth-century Radical Reformation (which followed the Protestant Reformation). Anabaptists were heavily persecuted by both Protestants and Roman Catholics because of their views on adult baptism.

While Sheri and I were on this Amsterdam tour with Nina, something quite remarkable happened to me. I felt a real and strong sense of connectiveness and belonging in Amsterdam, as I also did in the towns nearby, particularly in Haarlem. I wondered about this sense of belonging and upon further investigation when I returned home, I read in a recent study that it appears "experiences of our ancestors that lived 14 generations ago can potentially have an effect on one's life right now" (Andrews 21). As I mentioned earlier, my fourteenth great-grandfather Jakob Harnasveger had lived in Holland. He was a sixteenth-century Anabaptist reformer in Amsterdam. In 1535 he was arrested, charged and convicted with assisting in the attempted escape of several Anabaptists who had plotted to take over Amsterdam and establish an Anabaptist administration there. Jakob Harnasveger was found guilty at his trial, but fortunately for him (and his descendants), instead of death by beheading, he was only banished from Amsterdam for two years (Teichroeb 14).

Did this fourteenth great-grandfather of mine pass on some genetic memory to me? Not sure. But one thing is for certain, the sense of belonging and connectiveness was very real for me while I was in Amsterdam. It wasn't as if I felt that I had been to this place before, but it did feel like I was walking on sacred ground and I felt at peace there. I am so very proud of my fourteenth great-grandfather – this upstanding man stood up for what he believed and helped to protect others who shared that belief. He has inspired me to reexamine my values and ethics and to explore where I might assist others as well.

This visit to the homeland of my ancestors and discovering this link in my family chain has made me treasure and respect where I come from even more so than I did before my visit. I am so grateful for both the genetic influence and the life encounters of my ancestors. This trip back to my roots has given me a real appreciation of the life I have now, a better understanding of my own life journey, and insight into the many layers of who I really am.

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War on the Dnieper, 1941

By Louise Bergen Price

Eighty-one years after the Germans invaded Soviet Ukraine, war once again shatters the lives of those living along the Dnieper. Again, civilians are being killed and displaced, young men mobilized, families separated, homes, buildings, and infrastructure destroyed.

My mother, Irene Sawatzky Bergen, was twenty when the war came to Nieder Chortitza. Years later, she recorded her memories of the days when her village was on the battlefront, as did my grandmother Justine Sawatzky. I have used their stories as a framework, adding the stories of others to build a more detailed account. All translations from the German are mine.

Decades later, they would remember where they were and what they were doing on June 22, 1941, the day Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. It was a Sunday, an ordinary workday: Justine Sawatzky was on her way home from Zaporozhe when she heard the news; her sister, Mariechen Koslovsky, heading back from the *kolkhoz* [collective farm]. Mary Bergen, a high school student, was in the city picking up her graduation certificate.

Julius Loewen of Jasykowo had gathered with others in the village square. Loewen writes that "All faces were serious, no one dared to speak a word. When the clock struck twelve, the radio announcer introduced Molotov. With an agitated voice he announced the previous night's attack of the German Luftwaffe on Kiev, Odessa, and other cities. He said that the situation was very serious, and that the war would demand heavy sacrifice. But that a final victory on the Soviet side was certain. Without speaking, we went our separate ways. The future seemed dark and bleak. No one dared to express their feelings. But the beginning of the war was also the beginning of the end of the German settlements on the Russian steppes, of that I was certain" (101).

Immediately, residents were ordered to black out all windows. At night, searchlights crisscrossed the sky. All the young men of Nieder Chortitza had already been conscripted into the Red Army, so fifteen-year-old boys, as well as young women, were commandeered to dig trenches, dugouts and shelters. Tens of thousands of civilians put in sixteen-hour days, seven days a week. Julius Loewen described it as a futile exercise: the roads were not cut through and the trenches not wide enough to hinder the larger German tanks (102). Justine's daughter, Irene, wrote, "We were a group of 15 or 20 and travelled to Jasykowo [about 40 km north of Nieder Chortitza] in two farm wagons. In Jasykowo, we lived in the open fields, building small shelters out of twigs for the night. A woman from our village was assigned to cook our borscht each day. We had only the clothes we were wearing, so when we got drenched in a downpour one night, we ran to the nearby Russian village to get warm and dry" (I. Bergen 20).

Mary Bergen, too young to dig trenches, often sold the family's surplus produce at the marketplace. She recalled that "Loudspeakers blasted propaganda everywhere. Shortwave radios had been confiscated and the press was censored. We heard no news, just rumours and more rumours" (43). The official newscasts gave no indication that the Soviet army was retreating, yet to those listening to public announcements of battles fought and won, it was obvious that the front was drawing ever nearer. By mid-August, it neared the Dnieper.

Roads were crammed with refugees; wagonloads of Jews fleeing the German army telling stories no one wanted to believe. Maria Winter-Loewen of Einlage was among those who were skeptical: "We locals thought of the dreadful news as inflammatory propaganda, painting the situation in as gruesome terms as possible in order to spur people on to defend [the Motherland]" (153). Jakob Neufeld in Gnadenfeld, Molotschna Colony, watched as "fugitives from the west, mostly terrified Jews" straggled through the dusty village streets. "It was sad to see them, crowded together, dirty, gypsy-like on poor wagons on their weeks-long journey towards the east. Some were very thin and hungry. They knew not where they would finally find a place of refuge. We were sorry for them and didn't believe the gruesome fairytales that had spurred them to flee the Germans" (qtd. in Neufeld 72).

Warplanes left Zaporozhe regularly. They didn't stay away long, evidence that the front was getting closer. When it became obvious to the Soviets that they wouldn't be able to hold the line at the Dnieper, they issued commands for villages west of the Dnieper to take their farm animals to the other side. Agnes Loewen remembered the narrow village streets filled with cows driven from villages further west, bawling to be milked. "At night I couldn't sleep for the cows' distressful bawling.

Digging anti-tank trenches near the west bank of the Dnieper River.
Photo source: *Road to Freedom*, ed. Harry Loewen, Pandora, 2000, p. 29.

Then herds of sheep, pigs and horses followed" (qtd. in Lescheid 75). The animals surged through the village, trampling gardens on their way to the Dnieper. Many drowned trying to swim to the other shore. Herders, including young boys, tried to keep the animals under control and drive them over the bridges.

Factories were dismantled and shipped east along with their workers, further clogging roads and bridges. Jakob Krause of Neuendorf wrote, "Father had to take the combine over the Dnieper, so the technical material would not fall into the hands of the Germans.... It was about 10 August. Mother and I ran alongside to the end of the village. He [Father] told me that when we were to leave our home, not to go in the direction of sunrise, but rather to where the sun sets. Those are his last words that I can remember" (2).

Citizens were to be evacuated next. On August 16, Communist Party leaders issued a command giving all ethnic Germans six hours to pack up necessities. Justine asked a Russian friend what to do. "Hide so they don't find you – don't tell anyone. We Russians can stay," he said (Sawatzky). Since Irene was still away digging trenches, Justine decided to follow this advice. Her brother-in-law, David Sawatzky, who had offered to take her family along, also changed his mind, unharnessing his wagon and chasing the oxen away.

Jakob Redecop nailed boards on the windows of his Nieder Chortitza home to make it appear deserted, then slipped in through the last window and hid with his family in the cellar. The Letkemanns hid in the cornfield, camouflaging their cart with grass (Braun 131). Jakob Krause and his family slept in the orchard. He recalled, "One night my uncle said to me, 'Put your ear flat against the ground.' One could hear the rolling of the tanks. One could hear as well that they were coming nearer all the time" (2).

Those who chose to follow orders or were corralled by soldiers and forced to go proceeded as slowly as possible to stall for time, stopping to feed their animals. The bridge crossing the Dnieper was an impossible bottleneck with wagons, animals, refugees, military personnel. Katherina Berg of Neuendorf reported, "On the morning of August 17, the military police urged people to go. No one wanted to, but eventually they went. So the evacuation became dragged out and slow; many could get away on the side in different directions. Some hid among cliffs and rocks and behind shelterbelts in the field to return later, even if not immediately to their homes, but to neighbouring Ukrainian villages. Those who stayed in their own yards, ready to travel, didn't go at all. Because the police didn't know that not all had left and weren't really looking."

As the Germans advanced, Russian officials left their posts and fled. In Nieder Chortitza, the village mayor, a Communist, received a shock when he called headquarters in Chortitza, and a German official answered. In his panic, he dropped the telephone and ran to catch a boat across the Dnieper (M. Bergen 46). When the news spread, people emerged from crowded cellars, joyfully greeting friends and family. Joy often turned to sadness for families who realized that some of their loved ones were missing.

Although Chortitza was in German hands, Soviet forces were still based in Zaporozhe. If, as seemed likely, they would blow up the dam to keep the Germans from crossing, they'd unleash a wall of water thirty-two metres high. No one knew what would happen to the inhabitants of Einlage, Chortitza, Rosenthal, Nieder Chortitza or the villages further downstream.

On August 18, at nine o'clock at night, teacher Anna Sudermann heard a "tremendous detonation in the east" followed soon by a rush of water: "But the waves did not reach Rosenthal. We were calm now, because we knew the Soviets had vacated the right [western] bank" (23-24).

Downstream in Nieder Chortitza, Justine also heard

the explosion. For once, she must have been thankful to be living in the small house since it was at the highest point of the village. Within minutes, villagers hurried up the hill toward the cemetery and highway, bringing what they could carry. The Redecop family rushed to the barn to untie the animals, struggling with a calf that got its head stuck in a ladder at the last moment. Mary Bergen wrote, "After that, the rest went smoothly and all the animals, including the pigs, were taken outside" (47).

Break in the hydro dam on the Dnieper river, 1941. Photo source: Wikipedia Commons.

Now flood waters swept through the Dnieper lowlands between Zaporozhe and Nikopol, an area of about 880 square kilometres where thousands of soldiers had set up camp. "It cost the Russian army many lives, but even more war supplies – all were carried away. Cattle belonging to the kolkhoz from the right bank that had been driven over the Dnieper with their herdsmen were swept away by the waves" (H. Bergen 363). Above the roar of the water, people could hear the screams of those swept off the bridges, still jammed with refugees, especially Jews fleeing east, but also Red Army soldiers, Soviet personnel, and ethnic Germans. Some accounts tell of water red with blood. Estimates of lives lost range from 20,000 to 100,000 people (Moroz).

Although the floodwaters did great damage further downstream, Nieder Chortitza was relatively unscathed. Soon after the explosion, German scouts on motorcycle roared into the village. They were followed by a larger battalion. Justine's friend, Anna Penner, heard the commotion. She and a friend crept along the lilac hedge. On the road they saw "jeeps with trees on top and many soldiers in German uniform" (Lescheid 83). The soldiers were confused because of all the water – their advance scouts had made no mention of it. The girls approached the soldiers who were delighted to find German-speaking people but told them to go inside until it was safe – there still could be Russian soldiers in the area. At this point in the occupation, the Germans had no way of keeping prisoners of war, so the enemy soldiers were merely disarmed and released.

Meanwhile, young people from Nieder Chortitza who had been digging trenches in Jasykowo had been commanded to pack up and take their wagon over the Dnieper. Irene Bergen remembered, "We didn't know what to do, but our Russian overseer, Engineer Vorontsov (the son of my Russian teacher), who sympathized with us, told us to head west, not east, so we did." When challenged as to why they were heading in the wrong direction, they answered they were taking "smaller roads" towards the Dnieper: "On August 18, our group met a troupe of soldiers near Neuendorf. We had no idea what kind of soldiers they were until we read the words 'God with us' [Gott mit uns] on their belt buckles. In the sky above us, a battle raged, but none of us were injured.

"That day, the boys butchered a sheep, we gathered produce from local gardens, and our cook prepared a large pot of borscht. All of us had enough to eat. For night, we went on to Schönhorst and slept in a barn. The next day we headed for home" (21).

Irene doesn't describe the scars of battle that must have been all around – burned out tanks, bodies of animals that had died on the drive to the Dnieper, muddy pools left by the flooding – she was intent on getting home: "None of us knew if our families were still there, or if they'd been forced to cross the Dnieper. As we came into the village and past the large granary, I heard someone shout, 'Irene, your family is at home.' I was lucky. Many others found empty homes. Half of our village had been sent over the river, but amidst all the confusion, many were able to slip away from the

A bowl of boiled potatoes. Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.

Russians and make their way back. Two hundred and eighty did not return" (21).

Although those on the west bank of the Dnieper were no longer in danger of being transported, they were still under constant fire. Irene recalled that "We were now right on the front lines of the war, with the German soldiers occupying our village, and the Russians controlling the city of Zaporozhe across the Dnieper" (21). To escape the constant shelling, most of the inhabitants of Nieder Chortitza gathered up clothes and bedding and escaped to Blumengart, along with their cows. From here, they fled to Schönberg which was adjacent to Nieder Chortitza. Jakob Redecop, who had taken a leading role, organized the villagers into work crews, threshing grain and harvesting sunflowers.

Justine worried about the state of her house and the chickens they'd left behind, so Irene walked back to check on things. While she was in the house, a shell landed nearby and she took shelter in the cellar. After she emerged, a soldier appeared. He told her he was hungry – she assumed he want to eat, but he said, no, he was hungry for a woman. Irene was dumbfounded. The soldier looked at her stricken face and left. Irene found shelter with another woman for the night, before heading back to Schönberg the next day.

While Soviet forces in Zaporozhe were busy dismantling factories and shipping the contents east to keep them out of the hands of the Germans, the villages on the west bank remained under fire. During this stage of the war, 1,500 factories were moved east, along with ten million people, more than a third of whom were from Ukraine (Subtelny 461). At Zaporozhe's huge steel plant, Zaporizhstal, which produced seventy percent of the country's sheet steel, workers scrambled to move fifty tonnes of metallurgical supplies by rail to factories in the east ("Zaporizhstal").

By October 4, the Soviets had dismantled as much as they could. Dark clouds of smoke rose from the city and explosives thundered as the Soviets evacuated the city. Bombing from across the Dnieper ceased – it was safe to return home. All the windows in Justine's house were broken, but the family were glad to be back.

Relief was tempered by heartache, Justine said. So many families had been separated. Gradually, some of the people returned. The Peters and Thiessen families had managed to flee from the train at the last station. During the chaos, some families had hidden themselves in the fields and woods of Chortitza Island until it was safe to return.

In the weeks that followed, Justine kept a bowl of cold boiled potatoes on hand to feed the hungry. The people from the city had nothing. Many of the thousands wandering through the villages were people from the other side of the Dnieper who had been forced to dig trenches and were now stranded.

Gradually, life settled down under the new regime. Of the 1,281 inhabitants from Chortitza District who had been sent east, 450 managed to escape and return by 1942 (Fast 32). As time went by, hopes of reunification dwindled.

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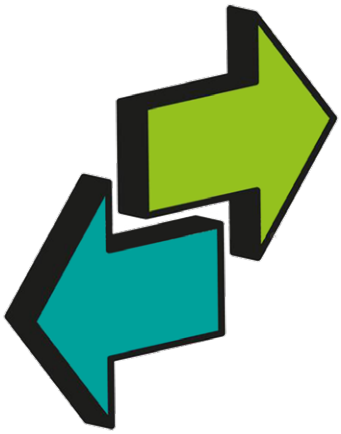
Joining and Leaving the Mennonite Community: A Genealogical Perspective

Part 7: Conclusions and Loose Ends



By Glenn H Penner (gpenner@uoguelph.ca)

The earlier instalments [1] of this series show clearly that, although relatively small, the number of people joining or leaving the Mennonite church in the various daughter communities of the Prussian mother churches was significant. Many surnames we assume were traditional Mennonite family names did not appear in the Mennonite community until after migration to Russia and other daughter communities.

The reader will note that this series has omitted those who joined and left the Mennonite community in what was once known as West Prussia. If one looks at the Polish period (mid-1500s to 1772) one comes up against a solid roadblock – the records of these transfers simply no longer exist. One can only speculate or, in some cases, make educated guesses. For example, Martin Dickmann was born a Lutheran in 1696 [2]. In 1728 he is recorded, as a Mennonite, marrying Agnetha Klassen [3]. One can only assume that he joined the Mennonites sometime between becoming an adult (around 1714) and his marriage in 1728. How and exactly when this happened is unknown and will likely remain unknown. Much less is known about the dozens or, more likely, hundreds of others who joined the Mennonites during their two centuries under Polish rule.

It should be noted that there are no solid guidelines as to whom I should have included in these articles. This was done entirely at my discretion. Having said that, I should include a few people who were unintentionally left out in earlier parts of this series.

Missed in Part 1: **Daniel Blatz** (b. abt. 1789; GM#164864). This family's background prior to becoming Mennonite is covered in an article in *Preservings* and was not discussed in Part 1 [4]. Daniel Blatz was a Lutheran from the Prischib German colony, who joined the Mennonites in Chortitza in 1814 [5]. He was living with the family of Gerhard Hildebrandt in 1816 [6] and married the Mennonite Maria Klassen in late 1816 or early 1817. This family name is rare but fairly well known on the Canadian prairies.

Missed in Part 3: **Christian Dosso** (1805-1879; GM#193817). He was one of several Lutherans who converted in Brandenburg. He married Maria Unrau in 1829 [7]. He is not listed in any of the immigration or emigration documents available for those who immigrated from Brandenburg. A source of unknown origin indicates that Christian Dosso became a Mennonite in July of 1823. He had only one son, Wilhelm, through whom the surname is known to have continued in the Mennonite community. This is a very rare family name.

Missing in Part 4: **Martin Boese** (GM#280519) and **Gottlieb Boese** (GM#10921). To my knowledge, these two men were the progenitors of all Mennonite Boeses. Both of these men were born sometime in the 1770s or 1780s and are first recorded as Mennonites in the Volhynian community. It is possible that they were brothers. Most descendants later lived in Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma, where the name is well known.

Missed in Part 6: The previous article in this series included a table from 1867 of Mennonites who had switched to other religions. This is taken from a German-language table found in the original Russian-language document. A recently obtained description of the document includes several additional Mennonites who changed religion [8]. They are the following (the page number refers to the original Russian-language document):

p. 19, Menn. Jacob Woelke, Muntau, wants to move to the Lutheran church.

p. 20, 20r, 21, J. Fast, Grossweide, wants to become Catholic in connection with marriage.
p. 22, Theresa Hamm moved to the Lutheran church in Prischib.
p. 23, Helena Friesen, Orloff, to Lutheran Molochansk congregation.
p. 24, Katherine Krel (born Koop), Muntau, to Lutheran.
p. 25, Helena Unruh, Gnadenfeld, to Lutheran.
p. 27-28, 32, Abraham Wall, Blumenort, lived in Berdyansk for 25 years, was never baptized and desires to become a Catholic.
p. 33-36, Jacob Harder (father Mennonite, mother Catholic). Mennonite minister refused to baptize him so he wishes to become a Lutheran.
p. 42-43, Andreas Schmidt lives in Winnitsa, Podolsk Gubernia, is a Mennonite, professes Lutheran faith and now wishes to become Catholic.
p. 44-49, 55, Maria Voth, Volhynia, from Mennonite to Catholic.

Admitting those from other religions in Russia without permission had consequences. Franz Isaac, in his book *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten,* relates the following: "In 1844 the Waldheim *Ältester* Peter Schmidt was declared unworthy of his office at the request of the Chairman of the Guardianship committee, v. Hahn, because he had *admitted a young man of Lutheran denomination into his church without permission of the high authority* and also banned members of other churches" [9].

Sources

1. See *Roots and Branches*: Part 1 (Feb. 2020, pp. 22-23), Part 2 (Sep. 2020, pp. 24-26), Part 3 (Feb. 2021, pp. 20-21), Part 4 (Sep. 2021, pp. 17-19), Part 5 (Jun. 2022, pp. 20-22); also see Sep. 2022, p. 25 for complete footnotes); and Part 6 (Sep. 2022, pp. 23-25).
2. Tiegenort Evangelical Lutheran church records, Tiegenort, Prussia.
3. Groβ Mausdorf Evangelical Lutheran church records, Groβ Mausdorf, Prussia.
4. Glenn H. Penner: "Family Myths and Legends." *Preservings* 2018, pp. 37-42.
5. Odessa State Archive, Odessa, Ukraine. Fond 6 Opis 5 Delo 2. I would like to thank Wilhelm (Willi) Friesen of Detmold, Germany for translating these valuable Russian documents into German. These documents contain a considerable amount of discussion between various Russian officials on what to do about Lutheran colonists wanting to join the Mennonites in order to enjoy the advantages of the Mennonites' special privileges.
6. May and October 1816 Chortitza Colony censuses: https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_May_1816.pdf; and https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_October_1816.pdf
7. The GRANDMA database. For more information see here: https://grandmaonline.org/gmol7/gwHelp/userGuide.asp. Note that the web address given in part 1 of this series is no longer functioning.
8. St. Peterburg State Archives (RGIA), Fond 821 Opis 10 Delo 507.
9. Franz Isaac *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten* (Halbstadt, 1908), p. 113. (in the English translation found here: https://www.mharchives.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2022/02/TheMolotschnaMennonitesFinal12Feb2022.pdf) Italics in this quotation are mine.

BOOK LAUNCH

Follow the Black Lines: The Story of George and Margaret (Siemens) Braun. **By Elsie Neufeld with Henry and Velma Braun. March 18, 2023.**

Reported by Helen Rose Pauls

There was the palpable buzz of a great occasion at the Mennonite Heritage Museum as a record crowd came to celebrate the book launch of former Abbotsford mayor Henry Braun's family history. Julia Toews on the violin welcomed one and all as we scrambled for chairs, filling first the main floor and then finding places in the balcony upstairs. Tulips glowed in numerous vases as sunshine poured through the windows; portraits and quilts gilded the walls; friends and relatives got reacquainted and visited; and borscht and platz were

Henry & Velma Braun, Robert Martens, Elsie K. Neufeld, & Bill Glasgow, at the book launch for *Follow the Black Lines* at MHM March 18, 2023. Photo credit: Jenny Bergen.

consumed as festive excitement and anticipation of spring buzzed in the air.

Jennifer Martens greeted us and introduced MC Robert Martens, long time MHSBC director and an editor of *Roots and Branches*; he was also the copy editor of the book. Life story writer Elsie Neufeld took centre stage as the editor-in-chief of the book, saying, "The story drew my heart into it. I was never bored." First cousin of the Brauns, Elsie spent many hours going over the vivid narratives taped years ago by the late George Braun, patriarch of the clan, and also interviewing Margaret Braun, George's wife, and children and employees. They decided to keep George's voice alive and "not to whitewash the details."

Elsie also spent countless hours with Henry and Velma Braun, and Henry expressed gratitude to her for helping to produce the family history. Henry said that the catalyst for writing it was reading *Poland*, by James Mitchener, in the 1980s. But the demands of managing the railway company George had founded and later of being mayor kept the project on the shelf. In 2021 he picked it up again when his mother asked him, "When will you finish the book?"

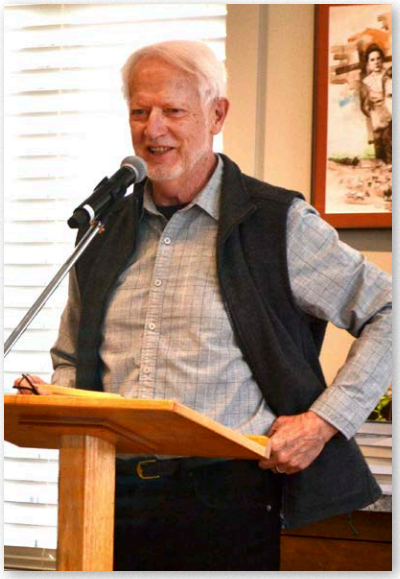
Many pictures enhance the family stories of George's early memories in Ukraine: the German occupation in World War I, the Great Trek to occupied Poland during World War II, and the journey west toward freedom when the Russians overran Europe in 1945. By 1948, the family was settling into Paraguay but moved to Canada in 1953. Stories of building up the railway business and establishing a large family of seven children are detailed in the later chapters, enhanced by interviews with employees and family members.

The title, *Follow the Black Lines*, refers to the maps the family studied to retrace their travels from Ukraine to Canada. They realized that the black lines on the maps indicated the railroads, their family's passion.

The book is available at the Mennonite Heritage Museum and selling quickly.

BOOK LAUNCH

Dad, God, and Me: Remembering a Mennonite Pastor and His Wayward Son. **Ralph Friesen. Altona, MB: FriesenPress, 2019.**
February 25, 2023, 2 pm, Mennonite Heritage Museum



Ralph Friesen reading from his book *Dad, God and Me.*
Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.

Reported by Robert Martens

Despite a forecast of heavy snow, a large crowd showed up for the launch of a book written prior to the pandemic: Ralph Friesen's moving account of his relationship with his Kleine Gemeinde pastor father. Mitchell Toews introduced the author. *Dad, God, and Me*, he said, had spoken to him directly, and in a profound way. Mennonites, he went on, have a proclivity for "linkages," especially regarding family. In every family, said Toews, "there is no ordinary."

Friesen began his half hour of readings with virtually no preamble. He read of his father, Peter D., who, due to societal constraints, could not directly speak his mind; of a stroke that disabled his father so utterly that he seemed unrecognizable to his son; of caring for his helpless parent and finding an intimacy there that he had never experienced; of his own youthful rebellion, and his refusal to be scared into conversion; of his later counselling practice that required some kind of faith.

Henry Braun and Ralph Friesen in discussion at the book launch for *Dad, God, and Me.*
Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.

In the following Q&A, Ralph Friesen observed that church life is markedly political. His father was confined to a role where he had to balance competing points of view, and the children did not understand that at the time. His father's generation, he pointed out, did not say things like "I love you" – a commonplace today – but

that didn't mean that their love wasn't real and embracing. All parents fail, he said, but "love happens one way or another." Peter D. Friesen didn't complain when he was incapacitated by a severe stroke. Never say, "My life is ruined," urged Ralph Friesen. Life is about making choices and making something good.

Friesen's readings were poignant, mixed with laughter and a few tears, delivered from the heart.

Housebarn at MHM. with the Fordson tractor in the foreground. Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.

A New House Barn at the Mennonite Heritage Museum

By Robert Martens

The housebarn was ceremonially opened under unexpectedly blue skies on April 1, 2023. Several Abbotsford councillors were in attendance. Deputy Mayor Patricia Ross spoke to the large crowd about the long history of Mennonites in the Valley and of their embrace of their heritage. Richard Thiessen pointed out that the housebarn is a replica of a house barn once owned by Mennonites in the village of Osterwick, west to the city now known as Zaporizhzhia. After he acknowledged the many individuals, firms, and volunteers who cooperated in the construction of the housebarn, Richard, Patricia Ross, and Peter Redekop, president of the Mennonite Heritage Museum, formally cut the ribbon.

Gallery Opening: Margruite Krahn – "Resurfacing: Mennonite Floor Patterns"

Reported by Robert Martens

In the late 1990s, Margruite Krahn was involved in the restoration of a Mennonite housebarn in Neubergthal, Manitoba. As carpet and linoleum were removed, a brilliantly coloured floor was uncovered. Mennonite women, it turned out, had long been decorating their floors, a tradition that began with their Dutch forebears, was passed on to Russian Mennonites, and then crossed the Atlantic in the 1870s with the Mennonite migration to the Canadian prairies. Krahn then realized that the garage on her property was originally a herdsman's home, and

Margruite Krahn describing her exhibit "Resurfacing: Mennonite Floor Patterns " at MHM. Photo credit Julia M Toews.

Margruite Krahn in discussion with a visitor at the opening of her exhibit Resurfacing April 20, 2023.

Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.

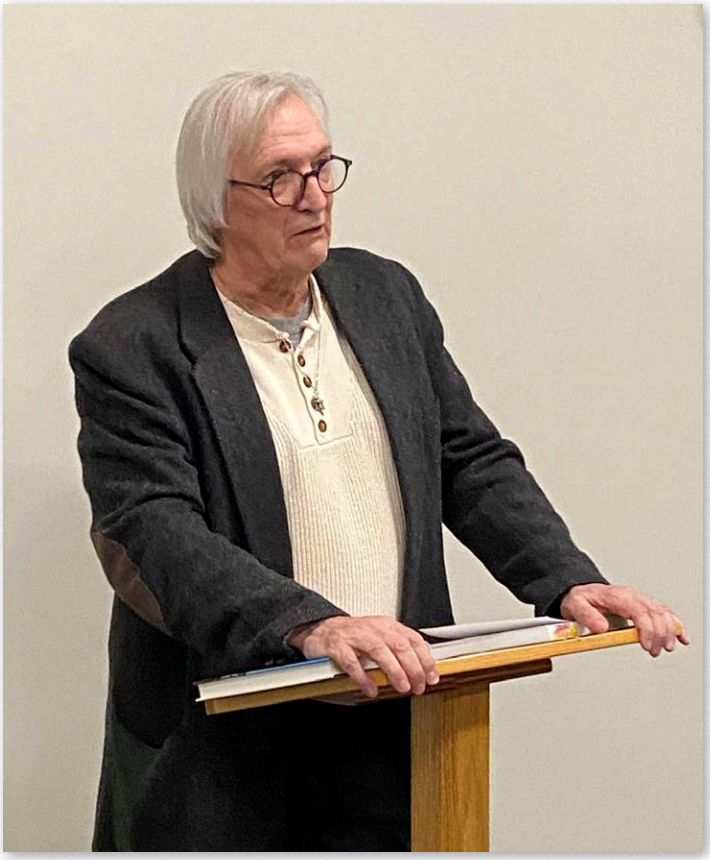
found that the floor in the dwelling was also beautifully decorated, primarily with stencils made from household objects such as sponges and potatoes.

While the Mennonite culture of the prairies was male-dominated and austere, women managed to express their love of beauty by painting their house floors. This inspired Krahn to reimagine these often floral patterns by painting them on cotton duck. On April 20, 2023, the Mennonite Heritage Museum sponsored a gallery opening of her work. Krahn spoke to the audience, led a Q&A, and showed a brief film on the topic. These women artists, she said, borrowed from each other's work, despite the differing styles emerging from, for example, Old Colony, Bergthaler, or Sommerfelder Mennonites.

This dazzling exhibit runs to June 16.

Books and Borscht

Apparently, Mennonites were writing books during the pandemic. The Museum played catch-up by hosting a number of book presentations and launches, nicely emceed by Peter Andres.



Richard Toews reading from his book *The Confession* at the Books & Borscht book Launch April 27, 2023.

Photo credit: Jennifer Martens

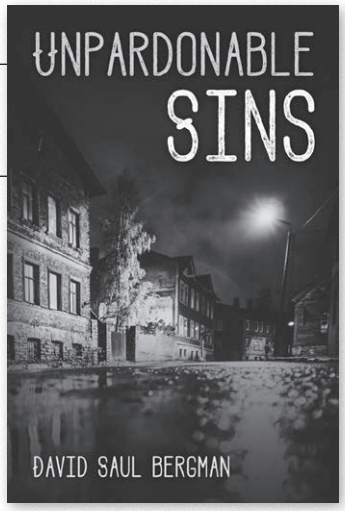
April 27: Richard Toews read from his novel *The Confession*, which tells the story of the interaction of Soviet Mennonites and invading German armies during World War II.

May 4: Robert Martens presented his latest book of poems, *finding home.* The book addresses the decline of community in the West.

May 18: On a hot and hazy day, Lorne Brandt talked about his novel, *A Sword Shall Pierce Your Soul.* As the plot involves Mary, mother of Jesus, he also led a discussion on the place of women in spirituality.

May 25: Louise Bergen presented her young adult novel, *The Canada Coat.* In a lively Q&A session, she led a discussion on the history of Ukraine under the Soviets.

David Saul Bergman. *Unpardonable Sins.*
Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2021. 199 pp.



Reviewed by Robert Martens

John Reimer, pastor of Lakeview Mennonite in Chicago, is gabbing with two close friends, a cynical journalist and a rabbi with an acid tongue. The conversation over coffee flows free and thick and witty. Reimer tells of an encounter with Fitzsimmons, a powerful city councilman: "He made a lame joke about the Amish. You have no idea how tired I am of Amish jokes. And just as tired explaining the difference between the Swiss and Russian branches of my people" (67).

And then the conversation turns dark. The unpardonable sin, mentioned by Jesus but never explained. Is there such a thing? Is there an evil so enormous that even God can't forgive it? Plato, contends the journalist, taught that error and ignorance are the cause of evil, and this became the standard view of the Enlightenment a few hundred years ago. "Right," replies Reimer, "A sweet liberal sentiment blown apart by World War I. That was when most thinking people figured out it was more than a head problem, wouldn't you agree?" (69)

Unpardonable Sins may be the one and only crime fiction novel in which a Mennonite minister hunts down a suspected serial killer. It is allegedly written by David Saul Bergman, but it is not – the novel was really written by Dale Suderman and Daniel Born, two accomplished wordsmiths who decided to use the pen name of Bergman. Dale Suderman died in 2020.

In the tradition of good crime fiction, the book's backdrop is unrelentingly dingy. Its beginning is gut-wrenching – literally – as a cyclist is murdered and disembowelled in a city park. John Reimer is sucked into investigating the murder through a whirlpool of events. His stubborn pursuit of the killer leads him nearly to forsake, for a time, his duties as church leader, and, though it never quite happens, nearly to forsake his faith. The trail to solving the murder brings Reimer face to face with political and police corruption. It also brings him into close contact with broken people and, as a pastor, he can't resist the urge to fix them.

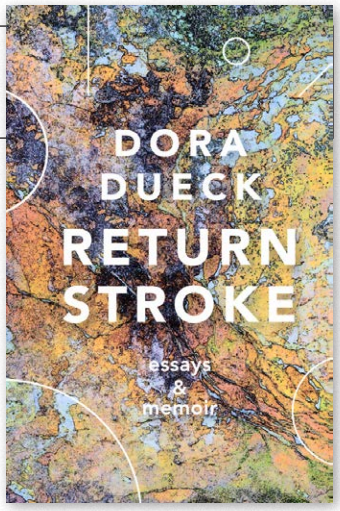
Reimer, and perhaps everyone else in this novel, is permeated with a sense of guilt. He fails, and fails again, loses his temper, tries to control those who seem indifferent to their plight. After one bad episode, he has a dream: "Someone chased him, someone he couldn't quite see. But he could hear his mother's voice in Low German saying, 'Shut your smart mouth, young man'" (156).

Pastor Reimer had grown up in a Kleine Gemeinde community in the state of Kansas, but fled its austerity and tight controls. As he doggedly tracks the trail of the mysterious killer, he occasionally resorts to nostalgia for the plain Mennonite community life: "The days when simple faith and *faspa* were virtually indistinguishable" (80). He has given up that simplicity to attend university, but he retains much of the tradition: Reimer doesn't drink when lured into bars by sources of information, and when he's tempted by a disturbed young woman, his reaction is to clean her house. "What is it that I like so much about the crazy people of this world?" he asks himself (26).

It's a lurid plot, as crime fiction tends to be. Strong language and sleazy scenes are part of the hardcore charm. Yet *Unpardonable Sins* is a book with a conscience. Reimer's world is terminally messy. "The problem was that getting to the truth so often clashed with making people feel better," he thinks. "It was the conundrum of his gospel calling: the sword that divides; the balm that heals" (55).

"A man of the cloth is always on a mission," says detective Reimer to a good friend (35). His compulsive pursuit of the park killer eventually leads to some kind of resolution. Suffice it to say that Reimer exercises the venerable Mennonite virtue of showing mercy to the offender. And is there an "unpardonable sin?" Perhaps, perhaps not. As in any good novel, no easy answers are given. Suderman and Born have written a book that is, at its heart, a series of questions, powerful questions, sometimes heartrending. A "serious novel" could not have done better.

Dora Dueck. *Return Stroke: essays & memoir.* Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2022. 228 pp.



Reviewed by Robert Martens

"Maybe writers write because they can't otherwise cope with things," Dora Dueck observes in her recent book of essays (183). It's a sardonic comment, typical of this writer who characteristically explores multiple sides of an issue at the same time. But words are indeed meaningful for her, they constitute a calling, a vocation – and, in *Return Stroke*, a means of giving life to her memories. Dueck is a born writer. Words and experience are inextricably connected in these essays, which approach being "confessional" – although not in the sloppy new age sense of the word – and bring portions of her life into sharp focus.

In her preface, Dueck muses, "The essence of life, it seems to me, is change – sometimes difficult, sometimes chosen, sometimes uninvited, but change nevertheless." Change also happens in the process of writing, in "seeing patterns, facing into inevitable death, enjoying the playful circularity of *then* and *now*" (2). But she adds that this book about her own life, in all its gritty manifestations, might be about the reader as well: "I hope that in offering you glimpses of myself, partially and with some vulnerability, I mostly give you yourself" (2).

Return Stroke is of course more than a book of ideas. It is packed with sights, sounds, and smells that jump off the page. The range is astonishing – after all, these essays were written separately, for different reasons and occasions, and sometimes overlap. Though the book is often tinged with darkness, it begins with some comedic writing on the author's failures, and successes, in cookery. A subsequent essay, "Learning geography," recounts the drowning of an eighteen-year-old classmate; Dueck grieves retrospectively, considering all the while how memory changes the remembering. In the essay, "Return stroke," she writes of her father-in-law, killed by lightning in the Paraguayan Chaco. Dueck never met him, and yet attempts the impossible: a fleeting picture of his life. A revelation follows: "If I have come to know my father-in-law, I thought, in some mysterious way he has also come to know me" (48).

The essays follow each other, as disparate, perhaps, as pebbles along a river. Her daughter's "coming out": "Yes, be mother" (60). Aging. "Reunion" with the self. Being old, and liking it: "I got lighter, discovered myself old, and the process felt backwards but exhilarating" (77). Her husband Helmut's death after decades of marriage, in "As he lay dying."

But at the heart of this book is a lengthy essay/memoir, a recounting of Dora and Helmut Dueck's stay in the Paraguayan Chaco in the early 1980s, and this is where *Return Stroke* picks up, gathers its strengths, and draws us to a powerful and heartening finish. Helmut was contracted by MEDA, Mennonite Economic Development Associates, to train Paraguayan Indigenous, primarily Enhlet, on the use and repair of heavy machinery. It was the couple's second trip to Paraguay. Helmut had been born and raised there, then immigrated to Canada, where he met and married Dora. They both stemmed from the Russian Mennonite stream but their histories were very different, and Helmut had taken Dora to visit his relatives back "home." Now, two years later, they returned as residents. "Are we crazy" for coming here, Dora asks herself. The Chaco can seem a forbidding land at first sight, and indeed was a grim place of settlement for the earlier Mennonite immigrants. "The wind, when it moaned, seemed to utter a single unfriendly and repetitive thing: *This place was never meant to be inhabited, you know*" (93).

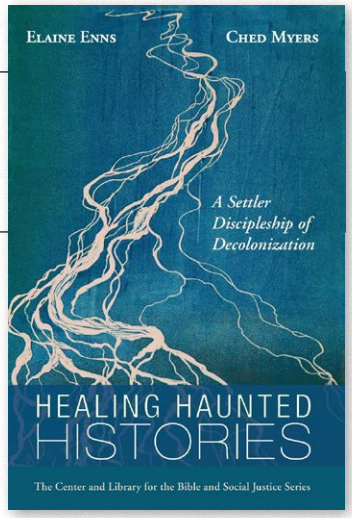
The weather in the Chaco was unpredictable, and could be brutal, as in a dust storm that occurred after a week of pre-Christmas house cleaning: "...the niece and the children and I gazed through the glass living room windows into a dense grey cloud of Chaco topsoil roaring toward us at gale force speed. It parted around the house but rushed for entry too; the air inside the house greyed, we tasted dust on our lips" (200). It didn't help that Dueck felt like an alien, or stranger, or even a tourist here. Her German was bookish and inadequate. "Speaking was a clunking, squeaking, grinding procedure

that wore me out in the midst of it. I felt I was saying things I didn't quite mean..." (155).

In time, though, this exotic land of wildly variable weather, of dust and dank and mud and enormous insects, came to feel like home. Helmut's relatives were kind and supportive. Dora, despite her "supportive" role in those pre-feminist days – she kept house, cooked, cared for the kids while Helmut did the aid work – managed to find time and space for reading and for writing her first novel. Paraguay became a place of pilgrimage, writes Dueck. A pilgrimage towards what? she asks. Partly, to explore her own historical roots: "a search for the Russian home – the customs and structures and language of community life..." (177). However, she writes, pilgrimage isn't all about arrival: it's a state of transience, of being in motion. "I ... think, in retrospect, of those two-plus Chaco years in the early eighties as a kind of wandering, not quite anywhere except 'on the way'" (177-8).

Perhaps reading this book is a pilgrimage in itself, a lovely wandering.

Elaine Enns and Ched Myers. *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization.* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021. 393 pp.



Reviewed by Robert Martens

The call to action in *Healing Haunted Histories* rings loud and clear: this is a book written by activists. The value of theories, write Elaine Enns and Ched Myers, "is contingent upon their usefulness to actual practices" (13). But theology and spirituality are integral to this book as well. Honest self-examination is essential to cultural and political change. This road to restoration and reparation is labyrinthine, say the authors, not a straight line, but is the "way to wholeness," as in the old Shaker hymn, "To turn, turn will be our delight / Till by turning, turning we come round right" (24).

Enns and Myers – Enns is the primary author – have written a book that they hope will incite "settlers" to action, to restore to the Indigenous what they have stolen. A haunted history, they write, is embedded in a society guilty of repressed or unresolved violence. Acts of brutality, such as slavery or the Indigenous genocides in North America, haunt us still, and our society urgently requires healing. What has been broken must be "re-membered." A land that has been seized must be "decolonized." We must act, write Enns and Myers, in "restorative solidarity."

The book is steeped in the Mennonite story. In the first chapter, "Storytelling in a Haunted House," Enns writes, "the backbone of this book's narrative is my family history and its places" (23). We are alienated from our heritage and our sense of community, she says; take inventory, understand our story and who we are; then, move on to decolonization. We are not responsible for past sins, but we *are* "response-able" for fixing them. And the first step towards self-awareness and societal justice is, says Enns, knowing one's own past.

Healing Haunted Histories is a rather odd book: snippets of family history, calls to activism, social analysis, worksheets, and more. As such, Enns writes, it might best be read a few pages at a time. The book is also a little top-heavy with introductions which, however necessary, make for slow going in the first pages. The writing quickly picks up speed.

As activists, Enns and Myers conduct LBS workshops, shorthand for Landlines, Bloodlines, and Songlines.

1. *Landlines*: "places of personal, communal, and ancestral inhabitation, past and present" (xxv).

Elaine Enns tells a family story that will be familiar to Russian Mennonites: the violence of the Russian Revolution, the civil war, and anarchist Nestor Makhno's depredations. The details of her narrative are chilling, but the accounts are interspersed with acts of kindness and grace. Many of our contemporaries, writes Enns, do not see the point in looking back to their past. She believes that consumerism, the fast pace of current life, extreme individualism, and a constant

gaze towards the future have alienated us from examining our communal past, Mennonite or non-Mennonite. We should be studying our genealogy, whoever we are, she writes, and it is important neither to romanticize our past nor to self-righteously denounce it. Russian Mennonites suffered trauma and lost their South Russian lands which, however, were previously occupied by Cossacks and Nogai. Then Mennonites, deeply traumatized, fled to North America, where they displaced the traumatized Indigenous from their lands.

Enns and Myers quote Frank Epp: "Mennonites were only a means to an end. The real purpose was to fill the prairies with a united Canadian society, … domesticate the lands in the face of Indian and Métis rebellion and discourage any American incursion…" (171). Mennonites on the Canadian prairies chiefly ignored, or were ignorant of, their Métis and Indigenous neighbours. Today, declare Enns and Myers, "we are all Treaty people" (189). It is incumbent upon North American "settlers" to repatriate what we have stolen from the Indigenous, who, write the authors, perceive land as sacred, not contractual. In fact, Indigenous understandings of a "people-land-Creator triad" are essentially the same as "the biblical notion of covenant" (191).

Bloodlines: "social and kinship identities … *not* technical 'blood relations'" (xxv).

Ethnic histories are frequently stories of trauma, of *Zerissenheit* ("torn-ness"), write Enns and Myers. Russian Mennonites were traumatized collectively and catastrophically, to the point that many stories were considered "too awful to talk about" (96). Not telling these horrific stories can possibly lead to further trauma. We must not "sanitize" the past by omitting what has been experienced, Enns argues. She speculates that mass rape occurred during the times of violence in Ukraine, and that these stories have been suppressed. Additionally, and importantly, we must also not overlook our own complicity in displacing the Indigenous peoples of Ukraine.

In North America, Russian Mennonites assimilated over a few decades to the prevailing culture: "How did we become white?" (205) Mennonites have gained much by adapting to modern norms, but the losses have been great as well, and now, writes Enns, we need to dispel our notions of "innocence," to which both conservatives and liberals lay claim. But, she says, feelings of shame are self-destructive. We should rather recognize our guilt, and act upon that to restore and repatriate.

3. *Songlines*: "the narratives, cultural practices, and ceremonies that sustain and transform individuals and communities. They are stories of conviction we seek to live by, and which motivate us in the work of justice and decolonization" (113).

Some of the Mennonite Songlines, says Enns, are singing, the concept of service, mutual aid, preserving the story, and centring in community. Songlines occurred in the occasionally friendly and supportive Mennonite-Métis relationships, and surely many of these stories have also not been told. However, Enns believes that today, Mennonite Songlines are withering.

Other Songlines have kept the road to justice open, and can point us in the direction of healing and restoration. The Black Civil Rights Movement, Indigenous activism, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada have advanced the cause of justice, write the authors, in a chapter devoted to the retelling of social justice movements. It should be mentioned that Elaine Enns's partner, Ched Myers, is a Californian. The couple live in the Ventura River watershed, where they have supported the Indigenous Chumash people in their struggles to regain what they have lost. California was historically the scene of a particularly brutal attack upon the Indigenous.

In their LBS workshops, Enns and Myers include personal covenants of action in the liturgy that closes the sessions. A call to personal commitment, they say, is what Jesus taught. The rich man who approached Jesus, asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life," was part of a corrupt social system controlled by the wealthy and based on fraud and land appropriation. "I have kept all the commandments," claims the rich man, and Jesus replies, "No one is good but God alone." Then, writes Enns, Jesus demands personal commitment. "Get up, sell what you have, give it to the poor, and come follow me." (Mark 10:17-31) The rich man leaves in shock. He was unprepared, contend Enns and Myers, to restore justice to the people of the land.

Update on the Memorial to the Victims of Communism

By Robert Martens with Ruth Derksen Siemens

Our readers may recall that a memorial to the victims of communism has been in the planning stages for some years. In autumn 2016, teams of artists, architects, and urban designers were invited to submit proposals for this memorial to be located in Ottawa. The jury that was selected to oversee the project included Ruth Derksen Siemens, professor emerita at UBC. A competition followed, with the public invited to vote for their favourite of five proposals. The winning design was "Arc of Memory," described as "a sculptural array of over 4,000 bronze rods intended to express the vastness of communist oppression and invite visitors to reflect on Canada as a free and welcoming country" (https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/art-monuments/upcoming-projects.html).

There were bumps on the road: the project is behind schedule and over-budget. However, it was reported to Derksen Siemens that the plinth and landscaping are ready and the project is proceeding. Some information is available online.

Ruth writes,

> "The design itself invites conversation, inviting guests to sit on the low sloping steps, read individual stories as they walk along the curved walls, and linger on the surrounding platform and pathways. As a member of the jury, I strongly resisted the ostentatious design of large vertical statues or pillars; rather, I supported the horizontal curved lines of the design that was ultimately chosen.
>
> But as is the case with so many projects, COVID-19 and stalled supply-chain issues have delayed construction considerably. It was hoped that the opening and dedication would be scheduled for the fall of 2022, but it has once again been postponed, to spring 2023."

Conceptual drawing of Arch of Memorial designed by Team Raff. Photo source: www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/art-monuments/upcoming-projects

The following paragraph appeared in the Memorial newsletter, fall 2022.

> "During his project update, Mr. Landry [Tristan Landry, Deputy Director General, responsible for Monuments and Public Art at Canadian Heritage] informed the diplomatic representatives that the general contractor was now working on addressing a few minor deficiencies on site, mainly on the plinth. This work is expected to be completed by end of October. The installation of the granite on the site is also expected to be completed later this fall, prior to the site closing for the winter months. In parallel, the material for the Arc of Memory is currently being shipped to the contractor hired for this element of the project. All the material is expected to be received by the end of January 2023. In parallel, work on the assembly has also started. A mock-up exercise, which is necessary to ensure the stability, durability and buildability of the Arc of Memory, is currently scheduled for mid-March 2023. Once the mock-up has been reviewed and approved, work will proceed to finalise the assembly."

Remembering Dora Becker

■ By Jennifer Martens

Dora Becker- volunteer photo for MHSBC. MHSBC files.

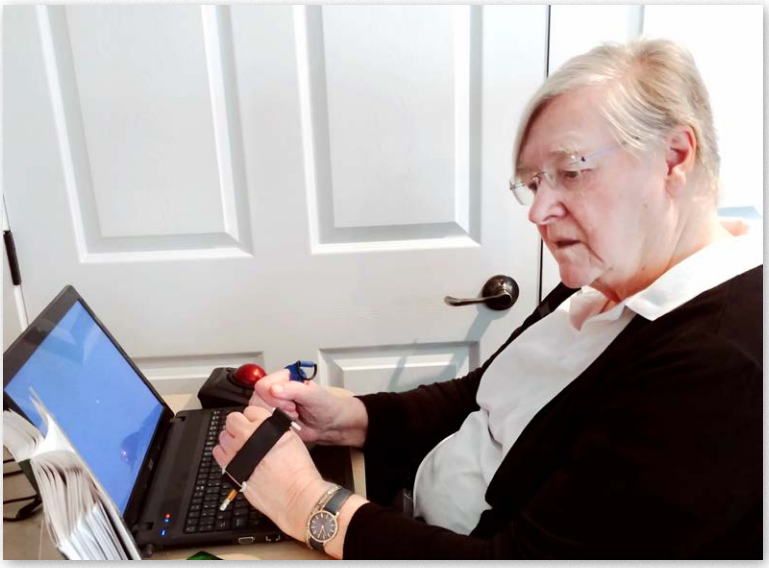
Volunteers have a way of breathing life into a place that is nothing short of magical and Dora was certainly no exception. I recall one afternoon, waves of a soothing timbre reached my ears – there was a song flowing out of our lunchroom and I knew instantly who was singing. The sound filled the building and drew other volunteers to the room. The magnet: Dora singing a hymn at the lunchroom table. We all stood rapt as the notes of the melody swept us into the heart of the singer and song. Love has many expressions – music is one of them – and this is how we remember Dora, expressing love for us in many ways.

April 11, 2007, was that wonderful day Dora began volunteering for the Mennonite Historical Society of BC. Her skill as a translator and collecting data from periodicals made her indispensable. "I am open to whatever needs doing … *I really like translation work*," she had said.

Later, when the Mennonite Heritage Museum doors opened in 2016, Dora expressed another passion: "I also would like to be a docent." She was a wonderful docent (museum tour guide), sharing our story with those who lived it and many others who were only hearing it for the first time, meanwhile working on multiple translation projects. Dora showed her zeal for teaching our Mennonite history: "I enjoy history," she'd remark.

Then came that fateful night in December 2019 at a choir rehearsal when Dora fell and her spine was damaged. The shock at this unthinkable thing that had happened rocked us all, and yet, as Dora recovered determinedly at GF Strong, she said, "This is an adventure, I've never had this happen to me before." And so we marvelled at her approach to the "unthinkable" and her will and concerted drive to return to her translating work at the MHSBC as soon as possible. Her goal was to finish translating her second book project from German to English.

As the weeks went by, Dora gained strength and continued her translating work from home. She sent us photos captioned, "This is me, translating!" Arrangements were made at the Historical Society for a desk that would suit her wheelchair. Before long, Dora returned to her weekly in-person volunteer work and made steady progress on translating the book. We are so grateful for the unconditional support of Dora's family for her volunteer work at the MHSBC, providing transportation and making sure she had everything she needed for her shifts. By February, nearing completion of the book, Dora was translating less and less. "I have decided to only make it one hour per day now! We'll see how that goes." She began to come in less regularly over the next few months, and then came the hospital visit for pneumonia in May. Reports from the family were that, although back home, Dora was more and more tired. Dora went to her eternal home July 23, 2022.



Dora Becker translating at home. Photo courtesy the Becker family.

It is with a deep sadness that we live with the gaping hole she left behind in our societies and community. We will remember and cherish her friendship and love for us for always.

Donations to the MHSBC in her memory are gratefully accepted.

Walk in the Spirit of Reconciliation

By Bridget Findlay, MCC BC Indigenous Neighbours Program Coordinator

This ecumenical event invites people to walk on the land between Fort Langley and Mission on the unceded territory of Sto:lō peoples. Sto:lō peoples have called this land home since time immemorial, and we hope that this walk honours them, their land, their river, their ancestors, and their children.

The walk was started by a group of churches in Fort Langley to commemorate the release of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission read at its closing ceremonies on June 2, 2015. The 2023 walk was the eighth annual event. It has grown from a group of thirty people to over four hundred people walking. People can choose a section of the route to walk on one of the three days, or do a solidarity walk separately. Solidarity walks were added during the pandemic, so people across Canada could participate by walking on one of the three days in their own community.

Large circle group in St. Mary's chapel.

Photo courtesy of Bridget Findlay.

The walk begins at the Fort Langley Museum, a place that celebrates colonialism, and ends at the site of the former St. Mary's Residential School, a place where colonialism caused significant harm to Indigenous children. We walk in lament and in solidarity with First Nations brothers and sisters, remembering the traumatic harm done to so many generations by residential schools throughout Canada. As any one of our family have been affected, we are all affected.

Left: Old kitchen trapdoor with painted floor design found in an original housebarn (c. 1910). Right: Floor covering by Margruite Krahn, 2017. Pattern: *The Maltese Cross* (faintly seen in upper right corner) *and the Flowers*. See story inside: "*Resurfacing: Mennonite Floor Patterns.*"

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.