Roots & Branches

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

Memories—quilt by Lois Klassen. One of the intricate quilts displayed during her quilt show at MHM February–April 2024 (using upholstery fragments, found silk and rayon fibres, antique lace, antique doilies, gel printed panel. Raw edge fused and stitched appliqué, broderie perse, hand stitching, free motion quilted). See page four.

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Editorial

■ By Maryann Tjart Jantzen

Last summer many of us joyously celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the 1920s Russian Mennonite immigration to Canada. My mother and her siblings were among the immigrants. For the most part, my mother never looked back, always grateful for the security of her new life in Canada. But in the early days, she and her siblings must have often thought about the family members left behind, knowing they would surely never meet again. As a child, I found myself wondering about these "missing" family members. I remember my mother speaking of the death of her beloved grandfather because of the early 1930s famine in Russian Ukraine, and I recollect going to Hastings Street in Vancouver with my parents in the early 1960s to purchase items from the "Russian" store to send to relatives in the USSR so they could sell them for cash. I've been sobered reading the EWZ (German immigration control centre) documents for my mother's cousins, some of whom were able to leave Russia in the mid-1940s and some who died trying or were sent back. And I'm discovering great-aunts and -uncles and second cousins who "disappeared" in the 1930s and early 1940s.

A century has passed since my mother and her siblings were able to come to Canada. Recently I watched Colin Neufeldt's April 2022 online lecture (for the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies) entitled "Those Who Remained," in which he outlines the devastating results of the Russian regime change on Mennonite communities. He emphasizes that "[t]he Soviet regime's dekulakization and collectivization campaigns of the 1920s and early 1930s proved to be one of the most repressive and violent periods in the history of the USSR. Millions of peasants were forced onto collective farms; many of those who were not collectivized were disenfranchised, disposed of their property, and later arrested, imprisoned, exiled or murdered."

Two of the articles in this issue speak to the traumatic experiences that many of the Mennonites who remained in Russia after the 1920s experienced. In "Restoring the Names," Louise Bergen Price writes of the apprehension and execution of her maternal grandfather, as well as many other family members, and the enduring ramifications for her mother's family. And Christina Janz Amazonas shares her experiences of solving four family mysteries—of finally piecing together the family tree puzzle of her grandfather's generation of Janz brothers, whose families were dispersed over three continents after the displacement generated by Soviet repression.

For my mother and her siblings, life in Canada was good, though the early years were hard. They were forever thankful to have been able to settle in a place of peace and stability. But their experiences of leaving behind so many in Soviet Russia shaped their lives in enduring ways. I and my family have never experienced a loss of homeland and family due to war and repression, never experienced starvation because of famine. Especially in light of our many blessings, it's important we remember those who were not so fortunate.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Upcoming Museum Exhibit: Honouring the Victims of Stalin's Reign of Terror, 1937-38: scheduled for early 2025. Details to follow.

Historical Society Special Event: The beginning and last years of the Mennonite story in Russia. Friday evening, October 25, and Saturday afternoon, Oct. 26
Speaker: Leonard Friesen, professor of history at Wilfred Laurier University, is the author of several books focusing on Mennonite History in Russia. His latest book, published in 2022, is *Mennonites in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union: Through Much Tribulation.* Details to follow.

Mennonite Heritage Museum
Books and Borscht Series
July 18: **Elma Schemenauer** *Song for Susie Epp*
July 25: **Loretta Willems** *A Sense of Presiding Goodness* (Dora Dueck introducing)
August 29: **Mitchell Toews** *Pinching Zwieback* (Special Guest introducing)
Books will be available for sale from the MHM Bookstore (if they aren't already).
Events are free but registration is required.

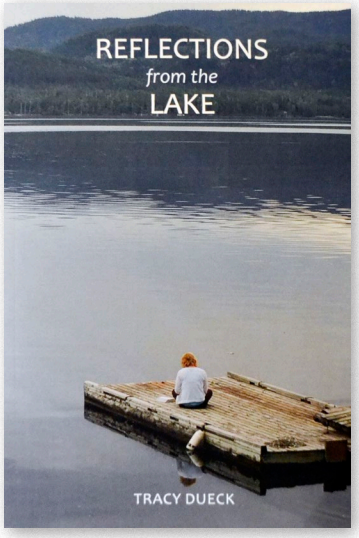
Free films at the MHM continue through the summer; call 604-758-5667 for film titles and details.

The MCC Quilt Exhibit begins in mid-June.

BC Heritage Week 2024

■ **Reported by Robert Martens**

It could hardly have been busier at the Mennonite Heritage Museum during BC Heritage Week. At times, the coffee and lunch shop struggled to keep up. The housebarn saw far more visits than it normally would. It was a full schedule, and sometimes exhausting for staff and volunteers, but everyone seemed to enjoy the ride.



On Thursday, February 22, Tracy Dueck, owner of the Tracycakes shops in Abbotsford and Langley, read from her recently published book, *Reflections from the Lake*. In her memoir, or rather book of memories, Dueck recounts her times with family at Canim Lake in the Cariboo. From her reading that day, those memories are precious. *Reflections* is a meditation on family and love, a recounting of gatherings at Dueck's "safe place," as she described it at her book launch. In the Q&A that followed, Dueck was asked how, as a business operator, she found time to write the book. It was a labour of love, she said, and also of grieving for days past, and took seven years to write. The book can be purchased at the Museum.

Former Abbotsford mayor Henry Braun was asked to speak during Heritage Week but his schedule wouldn't permit, so he delivered a talk on the following Monday, February 26. He began with the story of his grandfather's arrest and summary execution in the Soviet Union. Henry was born to his refugee parents in Paraguay in 1950 but the family immigrated to Canada a few years later. His father, George, worked his way up in the railroad industry, and Henry was smitten. Railroad work was for him. And though his father taught him to work ethically—for example, "be honest, especially when no one is looking"—Henry knew that his values were skewed. In 1988 he had a conversion experience and learned how to "integrate faith and life." He also learned that business can be ethical.

Henry Braun.
Photo credit: Jenny Bergen.

After he retired from the railroad industry, Braun went into cattle ranching. He had always loved animals, and he found that cows "like to be led" if treated with "gentleness and respect." Of course, he said, human beings are not cows, but he located a foundational principle here that buttressed his years as city councillor and mayor. "Each person is our neighbour," he said. Politics, he affirmed is a tough business—politicians need to be thick-skinned—and yet he enjoyed his time in leadership eighty percent of the time. Stressful? yes, but he would do it again if he could roll back the years. He had found "joy in serving."

Visitors looking over the tool display in the MHM housebarn.
Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.

MENNONITE MUSEUM GALLERY OPENING

Edith Krause, "Adam/Adamah" 7 pm, January 23, 2024

■ Reported by Robert Martens

"Adam"—human being, and "Adamah"—earth: the connections of people to land were paramount in Edith Krause's artwork on display at the Mennonite Heritage Museum. In Israel and Palestine, these connections are uneasy at the best of times. These paintings, said Krause to an attentive gathering, are not new, but derive from an Israel/Palestine MCC Study Tour in 2017. The depictions of "the holy land" in her artwork are based on photos taken on that tour. Then, superimposed on the images are photos of human tissue that might "cast a shadow over the paintings." And the intent behind human physicality clouding her landscapes? Krause referred to the ongoing study of epigenetics: how behaviour and environment can change how genes work, and how these changes might be passed on to succeeding generations. In this sense, the stress and conflict among Israelis and Palestinians, remarked Krause, have "become part of their visceral physical being," and thus "the situation becomes intractable."

Edith Krause led the attendees through her exhibit and explained each artwork in some detail. Art was a focus, but so were socio-political issues such as the injustices of inequitable water usage and of daily roadblocks for Palestinians in Israeli territory. After her talk, refreshments were served, followed by a panel discussion on the current and spreading conflict in Gaza.

Sanctuary—A Place to Listen and Contemplate. Screenprint: (cochlea tissue) on plexi-glass, acrylic panel 2018.

Dividing Lines of Sight. Screenprint (retina xs) on plexiglass, acrylic on panel 2018.

GALLERY OPENING

Lois Klassen, *Fragments:* pieced, collaged, and quilted textiles

7 pm, February 2, 2024

■ Reported by Robert Martens

"This community does support the arts," said Lois Klassen, speaking to a large crowd at her gallery opening at the Mennonite Heritage Museum. Mennonites, of course, have a long tradition of quilt-making behind them, and quilt exhibits in the Fraser Valley generally attract a lot of attention. Klassen's quilts, though, take the artwork in quilting a step further.

Fragments: fragments of cloth, said Klassen, but also in the sense that this exhibit consisted of five different series,

Lois Klassen beside her quilt *Prairie Storm,* MHM during the opening of her quilt show *Fragments* February - April 2024. Photo source: Jennifer Martens

including one she called "nostalgia quilts." The pieces of cloth used in making these quilts were vintage when she purchased them. The people that used them, Klassen pointed out, are no longer with us, and so there is a sense of nostalgia and melancholy embedded in these quilts: "Within beauty is pain and suffering."

Whatever our creation, we take pride in it, said Klassen. "People share their love of making." A builder once told her that, after construction is complete, he is proud of what he has done. In our creations is a "calm, quiet sort of jubilation"—and this is clearly apparent in Klassen's stellar exhibit.

"Restoring the Names"

■ By Louise Bergen Price

Outside the walls of the Zaporizhzhia prison.
Photo source: Louise Bergen Price.

Plaster has crumbled off the walls surrounding the Zaporizhzhia prison, exposing old brick underneath; razor wire edges the top. A narrow grass verge separates the wall from the road.

Inside the walls looms a red brick building, its windows dark and forbidding, barely visible from below. Our guide tells us that HIV AIDS and tuberculosis are rampant inside.

When I show my mother a photo of the prison where my grandfather spent his last days, she points to a place along the prison wall. This is where the gatehouse was, she says. Here she and her mother would stand in line with countless others, hours and hours on end. In the heat of summer. Even in mid-winter, clothes tattered, feet wrapped in rags against the cold, clasping their meagre packages. A multicultural group: Mennonite, Ukrainian, Russian, Romany. Hoping for a receipt to show their loved one was still alive. Until finally they heard the words: "Transported. No longer here."

My mother will never find out what happened to her father. But I will. Five months after Mom's death, I open an email from an author whose book I'd recently reviewed. After a note of thanks, the author asks if the following extract from NKVD files belongs to my grandfather:

Johann Sawatsky.
Photo source: Louise Bergen Price.

> *Zavadsky Ivan (Johann) Yakovlevich, (Jacob) born in 1892, born and lived in the village. Lower Khortytsia, Zaporizhzhya district of Zaporizhzhya region, German, elementary education. The ordinary collective farm of the KSPU "International." The UNWC "Troika" in the Dnipropetrovsk region, October 10, 1938, was sentenced to death. The date of execution of the sentence and the place of burial are unknown. Rehabilitated in 1959* ("Verbannte" 16).

Shocked, I stare at the screen. Then find myself sobbing from a grief I didn't know was there, surprised at my distress. I've long expected—even hoped—that Grandfather's death had come quickly. That he hadn't been worked and starved to death by slow degrees in the Gulag like my Janzen relatives. I've thought about him often over the years, and yet it is only now that I find myself grieving.

The NKVD file is cryptic—I want to find out more about what happened to my grandfather than is contained in those brief sentences. So I dig into books and internet sources and learn about NKVD secret order no. 00447, the "Kulak Operation." Launched August 5, 1937, and set to last for about five months, the operation targeted "former kulaks, criminals and other anti-Soviet 'elements'" (Werth). Other secret orders targeted those with connections to Germany or Poland. Anti-Soviet elements sentenced under Category 1 to be shot immediately; those "less active" sentenced to ten years in a Gulag penal colony (Werth). Quota for Ukraine: 28,000 arrested, including 8,000 to be executed. No trials—instead, a troika consisting of an NKVD agent, a Communist party member and a procurator would decide the prisoner's fate. "In those days it was easy enough to get rid of someone you didn't

like," Khrushchev would write later. "All you had to do was submit a report denouncing him as an enemy of the people; the local Party organization would glance at your report, beat its breast in righteous indignation, and have the man taken care of" (83).

A quick and easy solution for Stalin: sentence the prisoners, execute or banish them to the Gulag, and continue on with a country cleansed of its "subversive element." NKVD officers and those who assisted in the executions were sworn to secrecy. No one, not the local police, the victim, nor the victim's family would learn of the shootings. The official verdict was that victims had been sent to Siberia and were not allowed to correspond with anyone.

From August to December 1937, arrests happened at breakneck speed. January 1938 saw few arrests, but rumours of new lists being prepared were already circulating. On January 31, a directive for Ukraine prescribed a further six thousand arrests in category 1. Several more quota increases would follow (Bukovsky).

NKVD officials wasted no time. On February 1, black vans rolled into Nieder Chortitza. My grandfather, hearing the heavy pounding at the door, was expecting arrest. His last words to my grandmother were, "I can't help you anymore. I can only pray."

During Grandfather's time in prison, he was not allowed any correspondence with his family. But we have a rough idea of how he spent his last days from the account of Jacob Redekop, the only man out of seventy-nine arrested in Nieder Chortitza who was released without being sentenced. Redekop's daughter, Mary, later described her father's experience: "At the hearings, the men were beaten for refusing to sign admissions of guilt ... but since they were innocent, they had no idea what to write. The hearings and beatings went on day and night, and the moaning and crying never stopped. Father recalls being dragged out of bed and taken to the interrogation room where he was questioned all night. After living in this hell, all the men, including Father, signed admissions of guilt" (Bergen 28). Prisoners were subject to unimaginable torture: beatings with clubs, needles under fingernails, fingers jammed in doorways, sleep deprivation, heat chambers. Cells in the Zaporizhzhia prison were notoriously overcrowded: cells designed to hold four sometimes held from thirty to seventy people (Neufeldt-Fast 441).

On Monday, October 3, Grandfather's name was among those on the troika's list. It would not have been a long deliberation—troikas often pronounced several hundred verdicts in a half-day's work (Werth). Grandfather's guilt was taken for granted. He was sentenced to be executed.

For Grandfather, unaware of his sentence, life in prison would have carried on as usual. Little food, night-time interrogations and all that could entail. Once or twice a week, he received a package of clean underwear, lovingly mended. He signed the receipt with his name and the date and packed up his dirty laundry to send home. His family, he knew, was alive and thinking of him.

Late summer turned to fall with chill winds across the Dnipro. Late at night on Sunday, November 13, trucks pulled up to the prison once more. This time, Grandfather heard his name called into the prison cell. Surrounded by guards, he and the others were herded onto the back of a truck. For the first time in nine months, he was outside the prison walls. As far as he knew, he was jostling towards a train station on his way to the Gulag. He was emaciated, his body worn from beatings, interrogations, lack of sleep and the fetid air of the crowded cell. Only forty-eight, he would have had little chance of surviving a ten-year sentence of harsh labour. Still, he must have hoped to see his loved ones again.

It is also possible that he never left the prison alive. Grandfather's file gives no indication as to whether he was shot in the head in some grungy basement room, his body slumping to a floor already slaked in blood, then dumped with the others in a pit outside the city. Or—and here's another common scenario—driven to the killing field and made to dig his own grave. It was, one account states, easier to transport live bodies than dead ones.

A day or two after the truck carried him away, my grandmother arrived with her package of clean and mended laundry. After standing in line for hours in the cold, waiting, her package was rejected. Johann Sawatzky, she was told, was no longer there. He'd been "transported" November 13. (Sparse as this information is, I know even less about my paternal grandfather, Heinrich Bergen. So far, no NKVD file has come to light. He was arrested February 3, 1938, along with two brothers. All vanished.)

The scope of the executions due to NKVD secret

orders of August 1937 is mind-numbing. By the end of November 1938, 800,000 people had been shot, "this over a period of sixteen months, at a rate of 50,000 executions per month or 1,700 per day for nearly 500 days" (Werth). What is even more astounding is the absolute secrecy involved. How is it possible that no one knew of the orders for mass execution except those involved?

Stalin, who personally signed thousands of the death warrants, died in 1953. Three years later, on February 25, Nikita Khrushchev, whose own hands were also tainted by bloodshed, denounced Stalin in his "Secret Speech" to the XXth Congress of the Central Committee of the Party. Work, he said, was underway to "rehabilitate" those wrongly convicted during the years of terror (Khrushchev 584).

Monument to the Victims of Stalinist repressions: Dmytro Yavornytsky National Historical Museum of Dnipro. Photo credit: Louise Bergen Price.

In 1959, a committee—perhaps another troika—reviewed Grandfather Sawatzky's file and found that he was innocent. Then someone—likely a clerk—slid an official form into the typewriter, entered the date, scrolled down, typed the words: *справка о реабилитации*. *Certificate of rehabilitation*. Scrolled down again, added date of birth, place of employment, personal information. Pressed the circular stamp onto the red inkpad. Stamped bottom right of page. Signed and dated the paper.

How many clerks did it take to type up eight hundred thousand files? How many forms did each clerk complete, one sheet after another, papers stacking up on the desk? Weeks, months, years on end. Many of the files were thick dossiers containing lengthy admissions of guilt. I'm not sure I want to know how long my grandfather was tortured; whether he finally confessed. Who turned him in.

Some files had photos attached, often taken shortly before execution. These faces show a stoic sense of acceptance. I don't know if my grandfather's file has a photograph. I don't know if I could bear to see it.

Although the rehabilitation process after Stalin's death appeared to give relatives information about their loved ones, many of the details, especially regarding those executed, were deliberately false. Those who died during torture were said to have died of heart attack; those who'd been sentenced to death and shot had apparently died of pneumonia sometime during a ten-year prison term (Werth). This silence surrounding the secret orders held until the fall of the Soviet Union when historians were finally allowed some access to NKVD files.

Today, a stone from the Solovki labour camp stands in Moscow's Lubyanka Square across from the former headquarters of the NKVD—one of many monuments to those who died during the Terror. Here, people gathered annually to read the names of those who disappeared. I watch an online video of one such event, "Restoring the Names," held on Lubyanka Square on October 29, 2016. From morning until evening, for twelve hours straight, people line up at the microphone reading lists of names. It's a dreary day, raining. People huddle in warm overcoats, hats. A few with umbrellas. They walk quietly to the microphone, unfold their papers and read. Some have long lists, others read only the names of a few relatives. Towards evening, as the sky darkens, many carry candles until the memorial is surrounded by a sea of glowing lights. Still they come, one after the other, to read their lists. When the readings are over, a small crowd gathers and more candles are placed. There's no chatter, no conversation. Just a solemn quiet as they take their leave ("Restoring").

I imagine myself standing in the rain with my list. It is much longer than I first realized:

Johann Sawatzky, maternal grandfather. 46 years old. Worker at a collective farm. Arrested Feb. 1, 1938. "Transported" November 13. Burial unknown.

Heinrich Bergen, paternal grandfather. 38 years old. Arrested February 3, 1938. Disappeared. Also arrested on the same day and presumed shot: *his brothers, Abram Bergen, 33 and Peter Bergen, 31.*

My maternal grandmother's brother*, Peter Janzen. Arrested Dec. 14, 1937, for counter-revolutionary work. Sentenced to die on Jan. 18. Executed Feb. 3, 1938. Burial unknown.*

Grandmother's uncle*, Johann Pauls, arrested December 1937, sentenced January 18, shot February 2, 1938.*

My paternal grandmother's brothers*: Dietrich Boldt, 27 years old; Johann Boldt, 25; Willy Boldt, 18. All disappeared 1937. All presumed shot.*

My great-aunt's husband, *Jacob Koslowsky. Arrested 1936 and sent to the Gulag; died in 1938.*

The German word *verschollen* appears over and over in family accounts. Lost or missing. Disappeared. Presumed dead. Ten from my family alone. Of my great-uncles who remained in the Soviet Union, all but one were killed, as well as both of my grandfathers. Ten from my family alone.

How does a family recover from such losses? How does a community? A country? In 1992, Russian dissident Vladimir Bukovsky, who copied hundreds of KGB files dealing with the Terror, wrote, "It is hard to believe that anyone who lived through that period, as either executioner or victim, remained normal." What I find surprising is how normal many of these victims—spouses and children of the repressed—seemed to be.

Yet scars, of course, remained. Alexander Etkind writes, "In a land where millions remain unburied, the dead return as the undead" (182). The "undead" lived at the periphery of my childhood, seldom talked about except for oblique mentions at family gatherings, murmurs of "I wonder if he's still alive." Or in a note in my grandmother's diary on February 1: "Thirty years ago today they took my husband. I went outside to pick some flowers."

Memorial services no longer take place in Russia's Lubyanka Square. In December 2021, Putin banned the organization, Memorial, which organized the events. In Russia, it's Stalin who's now being rehabilitated, his image restored while his victims are again forgotten.

Each year, as February approaches, I check a corner of the garden where snowdrops flourish. They are hardy flowers, unfazed by late winter snows. I pick a handful and place them in a tiny glass on my kitchen table. I will remember.

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Call for Help

■ **By Irene Plett**

In 1880, Claas Epp led a group of Mennonites into Central Asia where, he predicted, the Lord would return. Several wagon trains followed. Conflict among the trekkers resulted in separate groups settling in Aulie Ata and Khiva. As the following shows, the resettlement was not easy. Since the publication of The White Mosque *by Sophia Samatar, interest in this "Great Trek" has surged. (Robert Martens)*

John F. Harms, editor of the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, wrote a passionate call for help in 1884. The circumstances of the migrants to Central Asia had become desperate, and a small group decided to join their fellow believers in North

John F. Harms
Photo: GAMEO

America; they couldn't do it without help. The response was remarkable, swift and effective.

The following is my translation of the article, with the help of DeepL. Underlined words were originally emphasized by inserting spaces between characters: "Khiva" was "K h i v a." I have added paragraph breaks for clarity. Elena Klassen kindly prepared the original transcription from the Gothic German script. The German text is in the German-language version of my blog post. Scans of the original magazine are also available online.

Published *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 23 Apr. 1884, pp. 1-3.

Thanks be to God that energetic steps are being taken among all Mennonites in America to possibly bring all Mennonites over from Asia. Who will help in this work? Large and small gifts will be gladly accepted by the editor, J. F. Harms, Hillsboro, Kansas.

Distress in Asia.

The readers of this newspaper have been informed from time to time about the situation of our fellow believers who have emigrated to Asia; perhaps only a few of them will be astonished or surprised to hear about such distress in Asia, which urgently needs to be remedied in a different way than has been done so far. The remedy will be discussed in more detail in another place; here, only a few excerpts from letters, which speak for themselves, are intended to point out the distress, from which the inclined reader can deduce the urgent need for rapid help.

From Aulie Ata it is written: "Poverty has gotten so out of hand here that we hardly know what to do, in addition we are already in debt to the crown [government] to the tune of 150 rubles [$75.00 per family?]. Since the time when we once made the difficult journey to Asia for the sake of our faith, we have already experienced more hardship and misery than the pen can describe or the mouth can utter. Already on our journey through the Don and Kalmyk regions we had to endure a lot. Many of our people died on the way. We stayed in Tashkent for two years, where some were snatched away by climatic diseases [typhoid fever]. — When we arrived in the country at Aulie Ata, smallpox broke out and was rampant for half a year. We were so far gone that we could no longer cover our nakedness, but we

Claas Epp with his wife Elizabeth and daughter Margareth in 1876. Photo source: *Trek to Central Asia* by Franz Bartsch, Echo Verlag Series, 1907/1993, p. 10.

bought some clothes and bread with the gifts you sent. — A big hardship is also irrigating the land here, because we don't have enough [running] water for that here, and making wells is impossible because of the depth [required]. In the winter we have to melt snow and ice, and this winter we had very little snow. We have come so far in our afflictions that we must cry out to God and man for mercy."

In Khiva, the situation is just as sad. The following is reported from there: "Of the thefts reported in my last letter, there have been several more, so that a total of 46 horses and 20 cows have been stolen, followed by brazen burglaries and robberies, in which the robbers used both firearms and sabres. Praise and thanks be to the Lord that no lives were lost, but wounds, more or less serious, did occur. Two brothers received sabre blows on the head, one of them almost had his ear cut off. Oh, they were terrible nights. — The robbers found a small sum of money at one woman's home. — This only made them more rapacious, and the burglaries became more and more bold. Thus in one place, they drove away the inhabitants of the house and built a fire in the house, they burned tables, chairs, etc. and ordered the

inhabitants of the house to leave, and when this order was not immediately obeyed, the robbers cut them with their sabres. — It is reported of one family that, under heavy forebodings, they had just committed themselves to the protection of God in serious evening prayer and were going to bed, when they soon heard the heavy blows of an axe on the door. 'Now they are here,' they whispered to each other, woke up all the family members again and united in fervent supplication to God, while the robbers tried to break the door down. The door, however, did not seem to give way quickly enough, and the robbers went on their way without having achieved anything. —"

Many more such scenes could be mentioned, but enough for this time, for it is already clear enough from what has been reported that those who have fallen among the murderers, so to speak, need the help they so ardently desire, namely, to be able to escape these hardships by emigrating to America.

Dear reader, how much will you give so that the Mennonites from Asia will come out of their misery? Will you give a dollar? Or even just fifty cents? Even less will be accepted with thanks and delivered. - J. F. Harms, Hillsboro, Kansas.

Calls for help from Asia.
Many of the same have already been sent by our fellow believers who have emigrated there, but mostly they were only private requests and, if they were congregational requests, they were only for help to settle there in Asia. Now, however, there are calls for help to resettle in America, and we share these excerpts from letters.

From Aulie Ata it is written: "We realize that we have gone too far into the East — several families have already thought of taking our flight to America — and we ask you for your advice as to whether this could be made possible. We are now again between fear and hope, for we have again been told by the authorities that if we do not accept [compulsory military service?], we will not be able to stay here. — It is not likely that we will receive even a kopek for our houses and households, although we have built up quite a bit, because we thought we would now have some peace. Many are also willing to stay, even if it means going to prison, but we are six families in number who have agreed to emigrate if this can be done. But we lack the means, so we ask all brothers in Christ, 'You will surely do as much as God will give you strength and joy.' — We were together yesterday, January 22, and discussed our emigration in prayer and supplication. We have to rent arbas [two-wheeled carts] beginning in Aulie Ata from town to town. A merchant has this line under his control as far as Orenburg and an arba costs 100 rubles on this route. From Orenburg to Samara, there is already a train. From there we have to get our emigration passports from Berdyansk. — We unanimously ask everyone to come to our aid with the necessary travel money. —"

From Khiva it is written: — "Since my last letter to America, our situation has become even more serious. — Although a guard has now been sent for us, one cannot have any confidence in the conditions here, given the complete powerlessness of the local government, especially since it still lacks the right will and only does what it has to do for Russia's sake. — But the serious question is what we should do. For a while we had the intention of going to the Russian side to live there as subjects of Khiva. We therefore made enquiries about it, the officials wanted it, but they could not give their word for the simple reason that the military law was against it. We have now, i.e., first of all some families, come to the decision to emigrate to America and expressed our intention to the congregation the day before yesterday (January 28). — But we have almost exhausted all our financial means and, encouraged by some of your earlier letters, we would like to ask you for your help. We are well aware of the demands we are making on you, and yet, apart from childlike, faithful prayer to the Lord, who is rich above all those who call upon him, this is the only way left to us. — If the Lord does not make the hearts of our loved ones in America willing to give, then the possibility of getting away from here, although the Lord's hand is strong enough to help in other ways, would almost be cut off. We cannot calculate how much the journey would cost. From here to the nearest railway station, Orenburg, about 1,300 versts [over 800 miles], a person might cost 30 rubles, from there to the Prussian border probably a little more; from there to America you know better than we do, dear brothers. It is a large sum and we would not dare to ask you for help if we knew any other way. — Our request now is whether you can make it possible for perhaps 20-30 families to come there. We would like to leave here as soon as

possible, as staying here longer could easily have serious consequences."

In another letter from Khiva, it says: "We would gladly use the cheapest seats, 4th class on the railway, and steerage on the ships, if only we are helped. —"

The above cries for help speak for themselves and we only wish that they will find a sympathetic ear among readers everywhere and willing hearts and hands to help. —

Do you feel compassion for the brothers in Asia? Surely! Then give, yes, give something! Give at once! Give according to your ability! Give willingly! Address to: J. F. Harms, Hillsboro, Kansas.

Excerpt from a letter.

From a letter from Aulie Ata to Peter Becker, Dakota, we take the following: ... "Beloved brothers, it is heavy on our hearts to write to you again and to thank you for your love and loyalty that you have shown us. 'Blessed is he who takes care of the needy, whom the Lord shall save in the time of trouble.' [Psalm 41:1] ... We wandered here as free people, but now it seems that it cannot be and probably will not be. It is so finely laid out and the little [state] services we are supposed to render seem small, but we may yet be caught and fully come under the law of conscription. Now we, I and brother-in-law Eck, as your fellow brothers in Christ, come to you for advice and ask you to take the matter in hand and examine what is best for us. We have little time and must decide soon to accept [the service] or leave the country. It seems that there will be a separation again. The colony chief, Jakob Janzen, and the village chief were recently away for two days and submitted a petition to the high authorities. The village chief himself said to me: 'Those who are willing to emigrate to America can begin to work for it.' — But what can we do? We are like the prisoners of Zion if we do not receive help from your country. We have now learned from Jakob Schmidt's letter, that you should have advice for the families who are from Tobias Unruh's congregation in Karolswalde. There are four of them here, namely my family, the Peter Ecks, the David Schmitts, and the Andreas Bullers. Four families from Karolswalde are in Khiva: the Bernd Beckers, the Benjamin Dirksens, the Peter Unruhs and the Cornelius Unruhs. These dear brethren are much worse off than we are, as can be seen from a letter from Cornelius Unruh. I think it would be good if the letter were published, so I am sending it along.... David Schulz."

Letter from Dec. 19, 1883, from Khiva from Cornelius Unruh to his siblings in Aulie Ata.

"Dear siblings ... We and our children are quite healthy and wish you the same with all our hearts.... We have harvested nothing this year and whether we will sow or reap in the future year is only known to God. It seems as if we are completely finished, because we are being robbed and plundered by the local inhabitants. Already 37 horses and 15 cows have been stolen from our village, including our horse and cow. There is hardly a night that the thieves do not sneak through the village and take whatever they can get. From the 16th to the 17th of December we lived through a terrible night. I don't want to describe to you in detail what kind of screaming and whining and what kind of shooting was heard there; it wouldn't do any good either—praise and thanks be to God that it didn't cost any human lives. We know that this is a test for us, and God wants to see how we will fare in it. We would like to fight back and defend ourselves, but because we know that it comes from the Lord, we have to endure this evil; but we certainly hope that the Lord will save us.... Ten families live in another village about two versts from here, they have surrounded themselves with a wall. There are 45 families living in our village. I will not mention anything else about our congregation, except that it is sad to say that Jakob Stärkel, Dietrich Ott and Gerhard Dück were baptized in the river and moved from us to Petro Alexandrovsk….

Remaining your brethren,
C.U. [Cornelius Unruh]"

Minutes of the Meeting for the Support of Needy Immigrants from Asia.

On April 4, 1884, at the home of Bernhard Regier in Newton, Kansas, at the instigation of brother Peter Claassen, a number of brethren who had received appeals for help by letter from Asia, respectively Aulie Ata and Khiva, met to discuss ways and means of how the brethren seeking help can most quickly and beneficially fulfill their ardent wish to escape the hardships in Asia poignantly described in various letters, and to seek a sheltering asylum in America.

The group organized itself by electing brother Christian Krehbiel as president and David Goerz as secretary.

1. Brother Peter Claassen presented letters and dispatches from the brethren in Nebraska, from which the assembly is glad to hear that the brethren in Nebraska wish to work together with those in Kansas in the work of relief.
2. However, as the urgency of the requests from Asia makes immediate action necessary, the group elected a committee of seven brothers as follows: the president and secretary of the aid committee formerly known as the "Board of Guardians," Chr. Krehbiel and D. Goerz, to the Business Committee in conjunction with B. Regier of Newton as President and Abr. Sudermann as Treasurer and H. Richert of Neu-Alexanderwohl, Wm. Ewert of Bruderthal and D. Gaeddert of Hoffnungsau as members of the committee.
3. A copy of these minutes shall be sent to the brethren in Nebraska with the wish that a committee may also be elected there with whom the Kansas Committee may communicate.
4. The absent committee members, D. Gaeddert, H. Richert and Wm. Ewert, shall also be sent a copy of these minutes and the minutes shall also be published in Bundesbote, Herold der Wahrheit, Menn. Rundschau and Evangeliums Panier.
5. An appeal to all for enthusiasm in support of the Asian emigrants is also to appear in said papers.
6. D. Goerz reported to the meeting that he had already made enquiries with the various steamship companies about special rates for the emigrants and was asked to continue the negotiations.
7. As a basis for such negotiations, today's meeting commits itself to a provisional deposit of $1,000 until a sufficient amount of support, which should be around $8,000-$10,000, is collected or at least secured.
8. The assembly requests brother Claassen to travel to Nebraska with these minutes, to consult with the brethren there and to bring back to us the result of the discussions there.
9. Decided to telegraph the twenty families in Khiva and to write to the six families at Aulie Ata that efforts are being made here to help them.
10. Brothers B. Regier and Abr. Sudermann are asked to write to the brethren in Prussia to ask for their help in the matter of support.
11. Support funds shall be accepted and used as gifts or loans, as determined by the donors; loans, however, are to be for at least three years and without interest.
12. The committee shall conduct business under the name "American Mennonite Aid Committee."
13. Moved to adjourn until brother Peter Claassen returns from Nebraska and reconvenes the group.

Christian Krehbiel, President.
David Goerz, Secretary.

The Mennonites in Asia must be brought over! It can happen!!! It will happen!!! Do something about it too, dear reader.
J.F.H.

An appeal to all to support needy Mennonites in Asia who would like to emigrate to America.

Many thousands of dollars have already been sent from America to Asia to help the Mennonites there with their difficult settlement, and that is right, beautiful and worthy of recognition. Such gifts have been gladly given and gratefully received, for which we have many testimonies — which encourage us to continue this support. However, it is now becoming ever more apparent that this one kind of help alone is not sufficient and not far-reaching enough, and many a donor has said when sending their gift to Asia: How much more lasting and far-reaching could our gifts be to the brethren in Asia if the money sent there were used to pay for the journey of the brethren to America. Here in our vicinity and in our midst, the brethren who are now in need of help would soon be so well-established that they would no longer need support. However, such remarks were only made in silence, for none of the donors wanted to agitate for America through their gifts, and that is not what these lines are intended to do. — The conviction and faith of those brethren who once held firmly that Asia would be the gathering place of the Bride Church should not be challenged by withdrawing or even diminishing the support so needed by those brethren. — But if, even without any action from this side, there are those among the brethren in Asia who realize that they have gone too far to the East, and who would like to escape the robbery of their possessions, murder and death on the part of the

heathen nations surrounding them, and for this purpose turn to America with the cry: "Help us so to escape the misery here and come to you in America" — then a second avenue of help opens up for us here, which we must not neglect any more than the first (indicated above) and it is important here: To do the one and not to leave the other. —

Thus, the request and invitation goes out herewith to all who kindly listen to the "Calls for Help from Asia" elsewhere in this paper, and who recognize the necessity of the requested help from the short descriptions of the "Distress in Asia" (in another column), and agree to the mode of relief noted below: send your gifts to support the needy brethren in Asia to travel to America, to brother Abraham Sudermann, Newton, Harvey County, Kansas.

Such gifts are gladly accepted by way of donation, but advance payments on loan for no less than three years without interest are also welcome, because the sum of $8,000 to $10,000 needed to support the twenty-six families already ready to travel would perhaps not be collected quickly enough by gift alone, but would be easier to achieve with the help of advance payments.

The descriptions of the conditions there are not exaggerated, but told simply, but truly. Have any of our readers remained without compassion?

The "American Mennonite Aid Committee" chosen to administer and use these gifts and advances will endeavour, on the basis of previous experience in the matter of relief and emigration, to stretch the incoming relief funds as far as possible by concluding passage contracts at the cheapest possible prices in the shortest possible time. —

We gladly hope that the willingness of our congregations to help and give may also prove itself anew in the support of these brothers calling for help to come over from Asia. —

On behalf of the meeting held in Newton on April 4, 1884 for the support of needy immigrants from Asia. The American Mennonite Aid Committee.

To bring about help for our brethren in Asia is, above all, our main task in editing this issue of the Rundschau. The descriptions of the conditions there are not exaggerated, but told simply, but truly. Have any of our readers remained without compassion? — If this is not the case, there should not be a single reader who does not do something to support the emigration project. Even the smallest mite will be accepted. Just think, many drops make the sea, — if each reader were to donate a dollar, or even more if possible, it would raise quite a sum. A close friend here wants to sell a cow and the proceeds are to be given to the emigration of the Asian brethren. Who wants to do the same? You well-off people, — dig deep into your pockets! The sum needed is large and the rich givers are few.

Elder Peter Becker from Dakota, who sent us the letters received from Asia, addresses the following serious words to our readers: "Dear immigrant brothers and sisters, when we look at our emigration lot today, we may say with the Psalmist: 'Our lot has fallen most delightfully; a beautiful inheritance has become ours.' [Psalm 16:6] We have enjoyed peace and tranquillity up to this point, and the Lord has blessed our work so that the fortune of some has already increased, and almost without exception we have all made a good living. Who has now so faithfully provided for us and given us the intention to move to this country? I believe it was our gracious and faithful God who did it, — and you dear brothers and sisters certainly believe the same. Now consider the difference between our situation and the situation of our brethren in Asia! — They are robbed and plundered, live in fear and are in danger of death, — while we can rest quietly on our couch here. Should the cries for help from these poor people go unanswered? I have already found many brothers and sisters in our area who are willing to make sacrifices, — but what do the readers of the dear Rundschau have to say about it?"

"God loves a cheerful giver." [2 Cor. 9:7] Isn't it true, dear reader, that you would like to give something for our brethren in Asia, so that they can be helped over here? What a joy to be able to give. J. F. H.

Die Friedensstimme

■ **Introduced by Robert Martens**

> *I naturally had not written according to their tastes, but on occasion expressed myself against them. Nevertheless, as a representative of Mennonite pacifism I had never advocated armed resistance. I was also aware that I had always championed the poor … (Abraham Kroeker qtd. in Toews ML 94).*

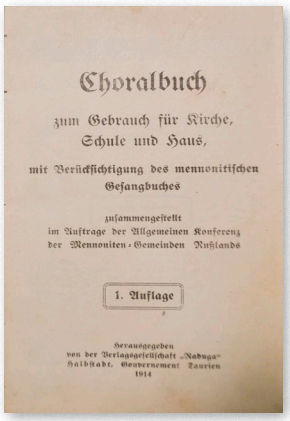
The Russian Mennonite newspaper, *Die Friedensstimme* (Voice of Peace), was in publication for only a few years—with interruptions—but considering the times, it seems almost miraculous that it lasted as long as it did. And perhaps miraculous as well that its editor survived. Abraham Kroeker, who founded the paper together with his cousin Jakob Kroeker, edited and wrote as he saw fit. If he felt strongly that the authorities were behaving badly, he said so. And when those authorities were as oppressive as the late tsarist regime, or as brutal as the communist autocracy initiated in 1917, it is hardly surprising that Abraham Kroeker eventually was forced to flee for his life.

Abraham Kroeker and family, Halbstadt, Molotschna.
Photo source: MHA 044-406.

A missionary, schoolteacher and farmer

Abraham Kroeker was born in 1863 in Rosenort, a village attached to the Halbstadt District in Molotschna Colony, South Russia (today Ukraine). He was clearly a multi-talented and inquisitive individual. At the age of seventeen Abraham was already teaching in Mennonite village schools. A few years later he travelled to Rumania where he worked as a missionary. Then, after he married Agatha Langemann in 1892 in Spat, Crimea, Abraham cultivated a farm for a decade. He was also a prolific father—the couple had nine children.

In 1897, in his mid-thirties, Abraham Kroeker began a writing and editing career which would last a lifetime. Often in partnership with his cousin Jakob, Abraham published the *Christlicher Familien-Kalender* (Christian Family Calendar) from 1897 to 1918; the *Christliches Jahrbuch* (Christian Yearbook) from 1900 to 1905; and the *Christlicher Abreißkalender* (Christian Tear-off Calendar) from 1899-1917. All three received widespread acceptance in Mennonite circles, both in Russia and North America. In 1904 he helped found Raduga ("rainbow" in Russian) Press, and managed the firm through peaceful and revolutionary times until 1920.


Choralbuch
zum Gebrauch für Kirche,
Schule und Haus,
mit Berücksichtigung des mennonitischen
Gesangbuches
zusammengestellt
im Auftrage der Allgemeinen Konferenz
der Mennoniten-Gemeinden Rußlands
1. Auflage
Herausgegeben
von der Verlagsgesellschaft „Raduga"
Halbstadt, Gouvernement Taurien
1914

A Choralbuch published by the Raduga printing press during Kroeker's tenure.

An inauspicious start

When the Kroeker cousins started *Die Friedensstimme* in 1902, they faced immediate official opposition. Censorship by the tsarist government in St. Petersburg forced the Kroekers to have their paper printed in Berlin; copies were mailed to their subscribers back home in Russia. Things became a bit easier a few years later. After the declaration of the 1905 October Manifesto, which granted freedom of speech and of the press in the Russian empire, publication of the newspaper moved to Halbstadt, Molotschna colony. Here, starting in 1906, it was printed by Raduga Press.

In 1914, with the beginning of World War I in which Russia confronted Germany, Russia banned all German-language presses within the borders of its empire—and that included, of course, *Die Friedensstimme*. Yet Abraham Kroeker's newspaper would rise again.

Language and culture

The early issues of *Die Friedensstimme* have been lost to history. As luck would have it, though, editor John Harms of the North American periodical, *Der Zions-Bote*, ran in full the very first editorial written by Abraham Kroeker for *Die Friedensstimme*. Among other things, Kroeker wrote, "Our main aim will be to serve the 'scattered' strangers in the world (1 Peter 1:1) in the various communities that yearn for the nurture of their intellects and souls. As a true voice of peace we want to present Jesus the Prince of Peace to their souls" (qtd. in Toews MH 2). Kroeker went on to offer special prizes for subscribers. The cost of a subscription, he stated, would be two rubles in Russia and one dollar in America. In 1903, he noted that *Die Friedensstimme* would run twice monthly.

Although some Russian-language writing later appeared in the newspaper, from the start Abraham Kroeker was in no doubt that *Die Friedensstimme* would be published in High German. He would write, "The language in which my long-deceased mother taught me to pray and in which I have prayed to my God for some 50 years remains sacred to me (and probably thousands of others) until the end" (qtd. in Toews ML 93). Kroeker also had cultural reasons for publishing in German: "In a sense we as Mennonites constitute an extended family and it would be difficult and unnatural for us to agree on a publication in which we would exchange experiences and viewpoints in a different language" (93). And Low German—Plautdietsch, the familiar everyday language of Russian Mennonites—was not, for Kroeker, an option. "Our Low German is definitely not a literary language; we are not used to reading or writing it" (93).

Stops and starts

Despite the prohibition of the German-language press in Russia after 1914, Abraham Kroeker remained resolute, resuming publication of his newspaper in 1917. Perhaps reckless, perhaps idealistic, but certainly stubborn and outspoken, Kroeker churned out new editions of his paper under the heading, *Nachrichten der Volksfreund* (News from the Friend of the People), and later simply, *Volksfreund*.

Kroeker's editorials were blunt and fearless. In the January 2, 1918 issue, he wrote, "The Bolshevik movement continues to spread unrest, disorder and destruction in the land" (qtd. in Toews ML 93). In April 1918, after German forces occupied the Ukraine, Kroeker wrote, "The German military has arrived here to free us from despotism and violence of barbarous men…" (94). When a socialistically-inclined contributor to the newspaper remarked that the concept of "mine and thine" no longer held any weight in the new Bolshevik world, Kroeker replied, "But it does! They operate according to the principle: what is mine is mine and what is thine is also mine" (94).

In 1918, a momentary reign of terror was carried out by Bolsheviks in Halbstadt; this later became commonly known as the "Halbstadt Days." Kroeker, who was away during part of this time on a business trip, returned to Halbstadt even though he was warned by his son to stay away. Yet he survived, and his newspaper apparently appeared with regularity during this period. In 1918 Kroeker renamed his paper *Die Friedensstimme*. "Our newspaper," he wrote, "is not as it was in the beginning only a publication for the Christian family. Because circumstances demanded it, it has gradually assumed the character of a newspaper. But as such it shall be guided by Christian principles and preserve a Christian character. This is why the previous title *Friedensstimme* is more appropriate" (qtd. in Toews ML 94).

Remarkably, *Die Friedensstimme* appeared in print until 1920, but by that time Kroeker was no longer safe. He managed to find passage in 1920 on an Italian steamer bound for Constantinople. From there he was able, with the aid of American Mennonite Relief, to emigrate to North America. At its height, the newspaper had reached nearly six thousand subscribers.


Friedensstimme

Preis: Diese Nummer 2 Rbl. 50 Kop.

Verantwortlicher Redakteur: Abr. Kröker.
Herausgeber: Verlagsgesellschaft „Raduga", Halbstadt, Gouv. Taurien

Anzeigen: die dreimal gespaltene Petitzeile Rbl. 2.50. Wiederholungen billiger. Adreßänderungen 1 Rbl.

XVII. Jahrgang | Sonnabend, den 30. November 1919 | Nummer 40

Warum geschieht uns solches? | hätte gerade so gut der meinige sein können, wenn — eine höhere Hand es nicht gelassen hätte."

A writer's life

Kroeker lived for a year in Manitoba, then moved to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, where he paid the bills by operating a bookstore. His second foray into periodical publishing was a failure; he was co-editor of a short-lived magazine, *Der Mithelfer* (The Co-worker), which only managed to attract a few hundred subscribers and soon floundered. Kroeker's life was anything but idle,

however. He wrote a number of books in Minnesota, including his best-known, *Meine Flucht* (My Flight), published for the first time in 1922, and then ten years later in translation as *My Flight from Russia*. Kroeker also compiled, edited, and published a new version of a favourite Mennonite hymnbook, *Heimatklänge* (Sounds of the Homeland), which had first seen the light of day back in Halbstadt in 1889.

After a long and busy life, Abraham Kroeker died in Mountain Lake in 1944.

Rediscovered

In 1970, scholars John B. Toews and Peter Klassen, in a meeting with German editor Joseph Schnurr, expressed their frustration with their failure to find copies of Abraham Kroeker's newspaper. A short time later, in December of that same year, Schnurr announced that he had found the originals of some of Kroeker's newspapers published at Raduga Press. Today, the 1917-1918 editions are preserved in the archives of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno, California.

Photocopies of many of these issues are now in the possession of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC. As an example of the content of these newspapers printed in German-language Gothic, the first issue of the series, May 13, 1917, consists of remarks on the formation of a new constitutional assembly; a poem on peace; an editorial questioning whether Russia is ready for full freedom; a report on the Jewish mission in Odessa; an obituary commemorating missionary Maria Martens Friesen; reports of unrest in Ufa; a timeline of the revolution; a poem, "The Night of the Tsar"; correspondence; world comment under the title *Aus Welt und Zeit* (From the World and Time); and advertisements and classifieds. The world comment section was a regular feature of the newspaper; later editions carried regular reports from Russian Mennonite colonies under the rubric, *Aus deutschen Ansiedelungen* (From German Settlements).

The following editorial by Abraham Kroeker (translated RM) appears in the April 27, 1918 issue of *Volksfreund*. It contains the candid and uncompromising language usually employed by Kroeker; interestingly, though, the well-written article directs much of its criticism not at revolutionaries but at Mennonites themselves.

Our Liberation

What we have experienced in the last four years! A war such as the world has never seen; the frightful confiscation of lands belonging to Germans living in Russia; one of the greatest revolutions in history; civil war; anarchy; and finally deliverance by the German army—all this was never sung to us in our cradles. But however great the sorrow and dread we have endured: "It is well; till now, it is well." Most of our properties have not been destroyed; the farms in the villages of Molotschna have remained intact; since the days of horror in Halbstadt (February 4-6), no more lives have been lost in Molotschna. We consider that an answer to prayer.

The last-named trials, though they continued only a few months, were the most difficult. It was not only sorrow and dread that we endured: hundreds were directly threatened by weapons of murder pointed at the chest or forehead—for many this occurred more than once. And many could not count the cost of what was extorted from them. They lived in extraordinary terror in those times when the anarchists passed through.

But an even greater blow to morale were the insults and humiliation suffered at the hands of men who—in the opinion of the victims—were of low standing. No doubt it was to the great joy and satisfaction of the plunderers when the so-called "former great men" came crawling to beg [*bitten und "vrachern"*] at their feet.

So who were they who counted themselves among the majority of the "proletariat" who caused these horrors? There were factory workers; a doctor who was in reality a good-for-nothing; a factory owner's son who had been disinherited for profligate living—and so on. And the majority of those forced to make a "contribution" to the rebels were from the working class. *They* never knew the meaning of the eight-hour day. In winter, of course, they had more free time (though there was still work to be done), but from early in the year to harvest-time they laboured at home and in their fields, sometimes in wind and rain; and then in the heat of summer they literally earned their daily bread "by the sweat of their brow." Most of them started small and incurred debts, then through thrift and persistence worked their way out of their debts—though some never did. Some ruined their backs through hard physical labour. They were workers in the black market [*Schwarzarbeiter*]. But they had farms that, under normal conditions would have had some value; they had reasonable horse-drawn transport,

good farm machinery. The majority also had hired workers. And so they were "bourgeois." Many of the wealthy among us—not all—also knew from experience the meaning of hard physical labour.

But there's another side to the coin. We were abused; that is true. However, we are not as guiltless as we might imagine. Only self-examination can assess to what degree each one of us has sinned against his or her labourers. We in honesty must confess, however, that we have neglected our labourers both intellectually and spiritually. We should have offered reading materials to our workers; and to those among them who could not read, we should have made it possible that they learn. And above all, though admittedly it was strongly forbidden by the authorities, we should have acquainted them with the Gospel.

And more: David said of Shimei, "Let him be, let him curse, for the Lord has told him to do it." [Shimei threw rocks at King David and cursed him for usurping the House of Saul. 2 Sam. 16:11] David understood exactly why this happened.

We feared so greatly—oh how greatly—that we would suffer from "propaganda." Yet very few of us suffered on that account. So why did we recently have to suffer? That noble conscience of our martyred forefathers, who were willing to suffer for the greatest good—that we did not have. We have suffered for the sake of Mammon, which we so desperately desired. We were far too materialistic, far too selfish. For that reason, God permitted the confiscation of our property; and when that was not enough, the knife had to cut even deeper. We are punished according to our sins.

Do we now understand? Have we learned anything? Yes, the suffering of these times has brought a few back to God. Some even say to themselves, "In the future we will contribute more to good causes, such as feeding the poor (and so forth) than we have in the past." But all things considered: probably quite soon an article will appear informing us of steep rises in the cost of basic foodstuffs caused directly by government confiscations. Will we continue to praise God?

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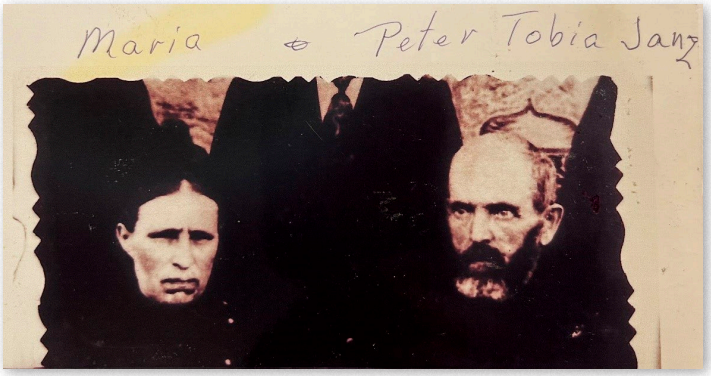
Genealogy Column: The Ties that Bind

Four Family Mysteries Solved: 1885, 1910, 1929, and 1990s

By Christina Janz Amazonas

Does genealogical research sometimes discourage you, with each answer yielding at least two more questions? Do certain questions never seem to have an answer? Let me share how our family has cleared up some of our mysteries. May you be encouraged to keep searching for answers to yours.

Early in 2023, Irma Penner "completed" (we know there is no such thing in genealogy) her research on five Janz Brothers (Heinrich, Tobias, Abraham, Jacob and Peter). Tobias is Irma's grandfather and Peter is my grandfather. In the 1920s, three of these brothers made it to Canada from Russia, my grandfather made it to Paraguay, and one brother stayed in Russia.



Picture 1: The cropped picture from the Paraguay Janzes, mislabelled as Maria and Tobias Janz, was actually a picture of Franz and Elizabeth Kerber (stepmother to Mathilde K. Janz, wife of Peter Janz).

All pictures courtesy of Christina Janz Amazonas.

Our first mystery originated from a cropped picture held by the Janz family in Paraguay that they believed to be of Peter Tobias and Maria Siebert Janz, the parents of the five Janz brothers (pic #1). None of the other descendants of the five brothers had this picture. But Irma Penner doubted this picture could really be of Peter T. and Maria Janz, as she had a different picture of them dated 1885 (pic #2). Family members immigrating to Germany from Russia in the 1990s had the same picture of the couple as Irma, also identified as Peter T. and Maria Janz. Irma's reasoning was that Peter T. Janz died the same year as the picture was taken, in 1885, so how could he be the same "Peter" in the picture from Paraguay. In addition, this man looked much older and thus could not be the same man.

Picture 2: Photo of Tobias and Maria Siebert Janz, 1885, held by several families of the Janz brothers.

So why then did the Janz descendants in Paraguay believe this picture to be of Peter T. and Maria Janz? Why did no one have the uncropped original to see who else might be on the picture? Why did no other extended family have this picture? These questions seemed unanswerable.

My brother Paul and I had been members of the Mennonite Genealogy and History Facebook group for only a short time when in December of 2022, by happenstance, my brother spotted the original photo of our "cropped" picture, posted by Irina Weissbecker, in a comment on another posted picture. Needless to say, he was quite shocked to see all the other people surrounding the couple. Then a flurry of communication occurred between us and Irina. How could this "online stranger" have "our" family picture, but not in the "Janz" context?

So here was proof that not all of our family information was 100% correct. Mistakes are made, memories fade and incorrect information or half-truths are passed on. Research to corroborate anecdotal stories is essential to support what we believe is family history. I believe discrepancies are often unintentional, except when information or lack thereof is done to protect people as, for example, for the family's reputation.


Picture 3: The original uncropped picture of Franz and Elisabeth Kerber and the Miller children from Elisabeth's second marriage.

Through Irina Weissbecker we connected with the Mueller (also Miller) family, and were able to sort out the confusion. The couple identified as Peter Tobias and Maria Janz was actually Franz and Elisabeth Kerber. Franz Kerber was the father of my grandmother Mathilde Kerber, who married my grandfather Peter Janz (Jr), the youngest of the five Janz brothers. After her mother Anna Boldt Kerber died in 1905, in 1906 Mathilde's father married twice-widowed Elisabeth Peet Mueller, née Wedler. Elizabeth's children from her second marriage are on the original photo (pic #3). At one point, we gather, Mathilde (Kerber) Janz had some communication with her stepsiblings, the Mueller children, who had immigrated to the US. Other Mueller descendants arrived in Germany in the 1990s. We do not think Mathilde Kerber Janz ever lived with the Mueller family after her father remarried, for soon after her mother died, she left Alt Samara (Alexandertal) to work at the Grossweide Orphanage, where she met and then married Peter Janz in 1909.

Coming full circle, Shirley Buller, a descendant of the Mueller family living in the US, had in her possession a picture (circa 1948) of my grandparents Peter and Mathilde Janz and some grandchildren, with Mathilde being identified as "John Miller's sister and family"; however, Shirley had no idea who those South American people were. Now my brother and I knew for certain that the couple in our "cropped" picture was related to

us, but was identified as the wrong set of grandparents by my father's generation. The picture from 1885 was Peter Tobias and Maria (Siebert) Janz and the cropped couple was Franz and (stepmother) Elisabeth (Mueller) Kerber.

Picture 4: The Jacob and Elisabeth Janz family, around 1914.

Many of our personal family discoveries have come through people sharing their knowledge about how to navigate genealogical searches. Irina Weissbecker and her contacts, through the Mennonite History and Genealogy Facebook group, were pointed to a 1910 letter in the *Rundschau* by Lidia Friesen, a long-time contributor to Willi Vogt's chortitza.org site. In this letter, my grandfather Peter Janz (Jr) asked for information about family who had emigrated from Karoldswalde, Volhynia, to the US in 1874. In the following thirty-six years, the families seem to have lost all contact. My grandfather's memoir mentions that most of his aunts and uncles from both his maternal and paternal side (Janz and Siebert families) moved to the US, and yet he writes in his 1910 letter that for some reason his parents (Peter T. and Maria Janz) chose to move to Molotschna, South Russia, in 1875.*

They arrived destitute, and the question remains, why did they not migrate with the large Karolswalde group to the US in 1874? What made them stay behind and move to Molotschna? One clue is Peter Janz's (Jr) comment about his father being involved in a court case with a Jew. However, no details of this court case have been discovered.

There is no proof that my grandfather's letter ever sparked any correspondence with his family in the US. Although a Tobias Dirks from Pawnee Rock, Kansas, responded, it does not appear my grandfather ever saw that letter in the *Rundschau*. Mr. Dirks passed away a month after he wrote his letter. Apparently, the family ties were broken and never rekindled, and yet my grandfather's letter has immense value to us today, as he lists the names of his uncles and aunts, previously unknown to us, including the maiden names of women and/or their spouse's full name. This information not only led us to a whole new line of relatives of whom we had no real knowledge, but also made us aware of Rod Ratzlaff and his extensive work on the 1874 Mennonite Volhynian migration to the US. In 2022 he compiled a Janz family tree which does not include my great-grandfather, Peter Tobias Janz, proof again of the broken family connections, as he did not immigrate to the US. Through this letter and the people he names, we have concrete evidence of our shared connection with this Janz family tree. Our hope is to one day meet in person with a descendant of these "lost" relatives.

Another mystery emerged. My grandparents Peter and Mathilde (Kerber) Janz and family fled to Moscow in 1929 (their final destination: Paraguay) in hopes of leaving Russia. Two of Peter's brothers had earlier already moved to Canada, but two other brothers had also fled to Moscow. His brother Abraham and family got permission to leave for Canada, but his brother Jacob, wife Elisabeth, and some of their younger children vanished one night according to my aunt Mariechen Janz's memoir. We had no other information about what could have happened to them, only the knowledge of what happened to other Mennonite families who could not leave Moscow. For the next ninety-three years, not a whiff of information about what happened to my grandfather's brother and family ever emerged.

Because of the other recent family discoveries, we posted an old picture identified as being Jacob Janz on the Mennonite Genealogy and History site. Irina Weissbecker continued to be our most valuable "online sleuth" and found valuable letters in the *Rundschau*, including one written by Jacob and Elisabeth Janz, revealing for the first time the names of Jacob's family

* Although my grandfather notes the year his family moved to Molotschna as 1875, his brother Tobias Janz's family, Irma Penner's grandfather, has the date as 1868. According to the Tobias Janz family, he was born in a horse-drawn wagon enroute to resettling in Grossweide, Molotschna, in 1868. Also, Peter Janz's family in Paraguay has the date as 1870.

members. We are so thankful for Irina's interest and the contacts she has fostered. Irina reposted the family picture mentioned earlier on another site, and through her connection with Lilia Nickel, we were able to connect with Andreas Willms in Germany, who is a Siebert descendant and had the family tree of the disappeared Jacob Janz family (pic #4). All of a sudden, another whole family tree emerged out of the ashes. We were shocked to make this connection! According to Andreas Willms, the Jacob Janz family lived for two years in Slavgorod, near Kleefeld, until they were exiled to Narym, Tomsk Oblast area. After much hardship, Elisabeth died in 1933 and Jacob, in 1937. Their children also suffered much.

Picture 5: Descendants of four of the five Janz brothers at a family gathering in Winnipeg, summer 2023. Christina is third from the right.

In a serendipitous twist, Margaretha, one of the daughters of Jacob and Elisabeth Janz, had lovingly kept a picture of her parents, which now after ninety-three years could be compared with the original complete family photo, providing additional concrete proof that we have found the Jacob Janz family.

Through Andreas Willms we also found out that some of the descendants of Jacob Janz presently live in Manitoba. We were able to connect with them and organize a *Familienfest* (family reunion) in July of 2023. After ninety-three years of separation, descendants of four of the five "Janz Brothers" got together for a lunch and *faspa*, full of gratitude and wonder at how after the upheaval, displacement, death and suffering of the last century we now were able to meet again as a family (pic #5).

Another family line lost to us was the Kerber family, my grandmother Mathilde (Kerber) Janz's family. One of her children's memoirs mentions that a sister of Mathilde and her family were supposed to travel with them to Moscow in 1929, which did not happen. Mathilde's daughter Liese (Janz) Wittenberg was in contact with some of her cousins left in the USSR, and was instrumental in assisting many of them to reach Germany in the early 1990s. Through my Aunt Liese, with whom I corresponded for many years, I had some information about the hardship and suffering the Kerber family went through. Unfortunately, her letters did not include the women's married surnames, and after my aunt died in the early 2000s, all contact was lost with this family line. Our family was now trying to locate the Kerber family, but we were stumped since we had no last name to assist in our search.

While I was in Manitoba for the Janz reunion, another cousin showed me a small handwritten Kerber family tree (she had no idea where it came from). On this family tree was an unknown surname. A few months later, another cousin's daughter, Carina Klassen, who lives in Germany, inquired at the Red Cross (*Suchdienst des Deutschen Roten Kreuzes für Spätaussiedler)* about this surname to see if we could locate anyone from the Kerber family. To our utter amazement, Carina received a call back from the Red Cross that confirmed they indeed had the name of a Kerber descendant, and would pass on the information that we were looking for Kerber descendants. The end result is that in July of 2024 there will be a small family reunion in Germany where I will meet some of my Kerber relatives.

These personal connections are what make genealogy research addictive and worthwhile, as we get to know vastly different family stories and honour our families by preserving their stories.

Much thanks goes to my brother Paul Janz for his help with this project. Please contact me if you'd like to respond to this article: xcel123@yahoo.com

Christina Janz Amazonas and her husband live in Abbotsford. She works full-time as a nurse in the Chilliwack General Hospital and has two grown children and two grandchildren. She stays busy with genealogy work, loves to travel, spends as much time as possible with her grandkids, and can't keep up with her yard work.

Lao Christian Church at Forty

■ By Robert Martens

August 12, 2023: As military aircraft thundered through blue skies as part of the Abbotsford Airshow, over one hundred people crowded the Eben-Ezer Church gym in Abbotsford to celebrate—away from the noise. It had been a three-year hiatus. The COVID pandemic had temporarily nullified the annual Lao Christian Church (LCC) commemoration, and now Fraser Valley Southeast Asians were ready to eat, sing, and worship together, in both Lao and English.

The afternoon began with food prepared by LCC women. All delicious, except that some of the paler faces in the crowd sweated up a storm when they ingested red hot peppers buried in the cuisine. Meanwhile, a series of musical groups took turns onstage, including Hmong singers; an ethnic grouping, Hmong live mainly in China and Southeast Asia, but many have now immigrated to North America, where some have formed new Mennonite congregations. The LCC youth worship band was probably the most fervent, proficient—and the loudest, with the bass and percussion at the heart of the performance. They simply rocked. English was their first language, raising the question, perhaps, of assimilation and potential loss of younger attendees. The three traditional dancers were young as well—one had been crowned Miss Asia Canada BC, and she had competed, she said, to raise awareness of Lao people in the country. Judging by the sea of cellphones poised to record this remarkably graceful performance, the dance may well have been the highlight for the audience, though the afternoon was only half over. The festivities continued through a hot and sultry day with prayers, homilies, and exhortations to faith and joy.

Lorn and Sylang Kaneboodtra.
Photo source: MAID-MHSBC 2011.027.063.
Used by permission.

Was it perhaps appropriate, considering the origins of this little Lao Mennonite congregation, that the celebration took place beneath the rumbling of jet fighters? Russian Mennonites, looking back on their own refugee exodus from the Soviet Union, would recognize a similar history in the flight of Laotians from their Communist-dominated homeland. Marxist activities in Laos go back to the 1930s and the efforts of Ho Chi Minh, but intensified in the 1950s and especially during the war in Vietnam. The Laotian Communist military, the Pathet Lao, were largely controlled by the much stronger armed forces of Vietnam, but their combat successes increased to the point where the US tried to "bomb them back to the stone age," as some of the more crass supporters of American military action put it. The US dropped more bombs in the country than it had during all of World War II, "nearly a ton for every person in Laos," according to the *New York Times* ("Laos" 4).

In 1975, Communist forces seized government in Vientiane, the capital of Laos. The new authorities were both incompetent and brutal. By 1980, ten percent of the population had fled the country. The collectivization of agriculture was a disaster. Opponents of the regime were tortured, executed, or "disappeared." The former King Savang Vatthana died under suspicious circumstances in one of the Orwellian-named "reeducation camps." Since then, Laos has moved on. Socialism has been redeveloped as "state capitalism," the state has joined trade organizations, the economy has leaped ahead, and President Barack Obama even visited Laos in 2016. Still, the human rights record in the country remains abysmal.

The pastor of LCC, Sylang Kaneboodtra, was born in 1951 in the town of Pakxe in southern Laos. Conflict must have been part of his life from his birth onwards. In 1972, Sylang was living in Vientiane, where he met an American airman who convinced him of the Christian experience. Sylang enrolled in Bible school in Thailand and joined the Church of Christ there before returning to Vientiane where he finished his training and then taught at the Church of Christ Bible School in the capital. Then the Communist regime took power. One of the Bible School teachers was arrested and send for "reeducation." Bibles were burned. Churches were shut

down. Sylang himself was arrested three times for his work.

The situation was impossible. For Sylang to continue his work there would have been suicidal. In 1976, he fled to Thailand, where he preached to Lao refugees. That year was momentous for another reason—Sylang Kaneboodtra met a young Thai pastor, Lorn, whom he married. In 1977, Sylang and his wife entered the Lao Refugee Camp in Nongkhai, Thailand, where Sylang preached, distributed clothing, books and pens, and taught language courses alongside his wife. By 1979, however, the couple was able to immigrate to Canada based on sponsorship by a Church of Christ congregation on Vancouver Island. They lived for a time with their sponsors in Nanaimo.

Meanwhile, outreach to Lao refugees was taking place in the Fraser Valley. Groups met in Vancouver on Friday evenings, in Greendale on Saturday afternoons, and in Abbotsford at Eben-Ezer on Sunday afternoons. Sylang became the spiritual director of the Lao group at the latter in 1980 after he and his wife had moved to Vancouver, Yarrow, Chilliwack, and finally Abbotsford.

The Lao group organized as a church in 1983. A special service was held at Olivet Mennonite Church to create a "home away from home, a place of refuge" for Lao Christians ("Beginning"), and a number of families gathered to sign a charter of membership. The congregation formally organized on November 6, with thirteen families participating. The Communist abuses in Southeast Asia had generated an enormous number of refugees, and BC churches planned together in order to avoid duplication: the Christian Reformed focused on Chinese refugees, the Mennonite Brethren on Vietnamese, and the Mennonite Church on Laotian. The Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church had sponsored an astonishing thirteen Lao families from a Thai refugee camp, and hence the Lao Christian Church, which officially affiliated with Mennonite Church BC in 1988. Helping refugees in their struggles throughout this process were missionaries Jake and Dorothy Giesbrecht and Eben-Ezer members Peter and Helen Sawatzky.

Forty years later, the church is still gathering on Sunday afternoons, with the administrative support of Mennonite Church BC and financial backing from Eben-Ezer. The language of services is Lao. Church members are encouraged to attend English-language services elsewhere if they feel the need. At forty years of age, Lao Christian Church persists through hard work, cooperation, and a community ethos derived, originally, from the refugee experience—so similar to the "Russian Mennonite" churches of past and present. Questions, of course, remain. What will happen to the church as its refugee story slips into history? Judging by the celebration at the Eben-Ezer gymnasium, the energy to continue in joy and faith still seems strong.

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Zwieback: The Twice-Baked Bun?

■ **By Robert Martens**

Though it now seems like centuries ago, I grew up within that "tiny slice of the Mennoworld" (Klassen 2) that clung to traditions developed in Ukraine and Russia. Certainly, "ethnic" foods were an integral part of my experience, and *zwieback*, the Mennonite version, seemed to me at the very heart of that traditional cuisine. I took for granted that my mother would bake batches of *zwieback* on Saturdays and that we would gobble them down on Sundays (though some would be missing, having been stolen by young hungry Mennonites as the buns emerged hot from the oven). Apparently, we kids may have violated the rules (according to the purists) when we buttered *zwieback* at breakfast time. A more serious violation occurred when I committed the egregious sin of dunking *zwieback* in my cup of hot chocolate, but my parents

never complained. I owe them my gratitude for their indulgence.

Of all the Russian Mennonite ethnic foods, *zwieback* may go back the farthest—indeed, perhaps to the time of Menno Simons himself. According to Norma Jost Voth, there is a Tweebackstraat, or Zwieback Street, somewhere in Friesland, Netherlands (3). *Zwieback* are consumed in much of Europe to this day, but they are an entirely different dining experience. European *zwieback* are a dry rusk, a crisp bread, sweetened, and baked twice. It has been alleged that the gifted and ferocious military leader Albrecht von Wallenstein, may have invented *zwieback* to feed his mercenary troops during the Thirty Years War. Surely, this kind of *zwieback* has nothing to do with pacifist Mennonites!

Zwieback from the MHM kitchen—so good with apricot jam.
Photo credit: Julia M. Toews

Zwieback: "twice-baked bread." Not in my experience. As a child, I assumed that this term referred to the double bun: a large piece on the bottom, a smaller piece pinched onto the top. Apparently not. Mennonites *have* twice-baked their *zwieback* when they needed to pack food for a long journey, but they had an altogether different name for this: *Reesche Tweiback*. Typically, however, Mennonite *zwieback* are *not* a rusk (like, interestingly, biscotti, which derives from the Italian "bis"—twice, and "cotti"—baked). But the "twice-baked" name has stuck.

Humourist and blogger S. L. Klassen writes that *zwieback* have been a "bread of contention" among Russian Mennonites. No schisms, no shunnings, but contention nevertheless. "But," she writes, "*zwieback* (or *tweebakje* in Low German) is a bread worth fighting for" (3). She is—as we all should be—passionate about a good cause! So what kind of controversies surround the baking of *zwieback*?

First of all, the use of butter. Lard has been used as an ingredient, even potato starch, but these might be classified as borderline heretical. Klassen throws out the challenge: "…I still hold that true *zwieback* have butter and the absence of a family cow is no excuse" (4).

Then, dunking. Appropriate for the twice-baked, but not so much for *zwieback* fresh from the oven. (My childhood dunking should be seen as an aberration.)

Pinching or rolling. Pinching *zwieback*, taking a piece of dough and then pinching it off between thumb and forefinger, is the correct procedure. Or perhaps not. There are those who roll a piece of dough between their palms. Easier? or just plain wrong? "The youtube (sic) consensus," writes Klassen, "suggests that the pinchers have gained ascendancy in this long-standing dispute but there may still be an underground community of *zwieback* rollers who have as yet simply stayed clear of internet videography" (5).

And finally, a historical spat. Anecdotal? yes, but there may be some truth to it. The Russian Mennonite colonies of Molotschna and Chortitza carried on a long-standing dispute. The Chortitza Mennonites were the first to arrive in South Russia (in 1789) and so, naturally, felt themselves a tad superior. Molotschna Mennonites arrived later (in 1804) but quickly flourished and were soon richer than their colleagues in Chortitza. The story is told that the Molotschna villagers accused their Chortitza cousins of baking their *zwieback* far too large. The quality of daintiness, so important for *zwieback*, had been neglected. The story is also told that Chortitza bakers made their *zwieback* bigger because their Molotschna cousins had been seen filching smaller *zwieback* in their coat pockets.

If this dispute took place at all, it was certainly a better option than shunning. Baking *zwieback* had, in fact, been a communal enterprise; recipes and techniques were shared, especially at elaborate wedding festivities, when hundreds, or thousands of *zwieback* would be baked for the special event. Despite the arguments over correct methods and recipes, writes Klassen, "*zwieback*

draw us together even as they pull us apart. I know from experience that the Mennonite Brethren *zwieback* is indistinguishable from the *zwieback* of my own heritage. And as far as I can tell, the Old Colony and Kleine Gemeinde break their *zwieback* and enjoy the same jams on them as the Bergthaler and the Sommerfelder Mennonites" (8).

Then there are those (non-Russian) Mennonites for whom *zwieback* are completely unknown: "I know that there are a lot of other Mennonites," writes Klassen (2). Russian Mennonites are a "tiny slice" of the Mennonite baking pan. So, extend a hand, and a *zwieback* too, if you have any. "And, really," she concludes, "we're usually happy to share with people from other ethnicities and religious traditions as well" (8).

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A recipe from *Mennonite Girls Can Cook*

http://www.mennonitegirlscancook.ca/2015/01/zwieback.html

Zwieback (the Mennonite bun) are double-decker yeast rolls, that were traditionally served at every festive occasion, from Sunday afternoon *Faspa* to weddings and funerals. My mother-in-law made the best *zwieback* that were tiny, perfectly formed, melt-in-your-mouth morsels. According to her, the secret was using REAL butter. In our home, these were known as "Grandma buns."

Zwieback

- 1 cup warm water
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 3 tablespoons traditional yeast
- 1 1/2 cups butter
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 2 cups warm potato water*
- 4 cups scalded milk
- 14 cups flour (about)

*I add 1/2 cup instant potato flakes to the water to make "potato water."

1. Pour hot milk and potato water over butter, salt and sugar in large bowl. Let cool 5-10 minutes.
2. Prepare yeast by dissolving 2 tsp. sugar in 1 cup water and adding yeast.
3. Add 6 cups flour to the milk/butter mixture and beat well.
4. Continue adding flour and mix until the dough pulls away from the sides of the bowl. Dough will be very soft.
5. Knead about five minutes more.
6. Cover and let rise until double in bulk.
7. Form the buns. Bottom bun is about the size of a large walnut...top bun is smaller. Place smaller ball on top of larger one...and push down through centre of both balls with knuckle of index finger to prevent buns from falling over during baking.
8. Let rise until light.
9. Bake at 375 degrees for about 20 minutes.

Note: Now that is the original recipe, but since I mix all my breads in the Bosch machine...it is much simpler for me than it was in ages past!

Addendum: A reference to *zwieback* occurs in a poem by American humourist Ogden Nash, "The Adventures of Isabel." Would our readers have any idea why it is there? What follows is just one stanza; the complete lyric can be accessed online.

The Adventures of Isabel

Ogden Nash

Isabel met a hideous giant,
Isabel continued self reliant.
The giant was hairy, the giant was horrid,
He had one eye in the middle of his forehead.
Good morning, Isabel, the giant said,
I'll grind your bones to make my bread.
Isabel, Isabel, didn't worry,
Isabel didn't scream or scurry.
She nibbled the zwieback that she always fed off,
And when it was gone, she cut the giant's head off.

Bill Thiessen introducing Annabaptist history to visitors at the Mennonite Heritage Museum. Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.

Deepening the Gene Pool

One Day at the Mennonite Heritage Museum

By Bill Thiessen

Bill Thiessen volunteers as a docent at the Museum, guiding visitors through the Anabaptist History Gallery. Here he reflects on one day's interactions with visitors to the exhibit.

"Could I become an Anabaptist here?" This in effect was the question on the minds of some inquisitive guests. Consequently, I began to visualize the Gallery as a gathering of new or restored "Anabaptists," those by ancestry; those by marriage; those by choice—a veritable newly-emerging community.

A cluster of Webbs came because, one of them exclaimed to her husband and her father-in-law, "This is my background! My name is Isaak with a 'K.'" Hardly taking a breath, she recounted what seemed to be a convoluted journey: Paraguay, Idaho, Abbotsford, and Medicine Hat, where her husband, a psychologist, is a college instructor. She tried desperately to describe the variations of "Mennonite" to her husband and father-in-law. "My background is Old Colony," she added, which she tried to explain with little success. Her question of me was about the distinctions between the variations—what are the differences, particularly between "GC" and "MB?" (General Conference / Mennonite Brethren Conference).

A guest with a distinctly academic persona stated confidently upon entry, "I am an Anabaptist as well. I

have been baptized twice; the second, upon confession of faith. I am now a member of a Baptist church; however, I hold to the Anabaptist distinctives." He and his family live near London, England, where he is an instructor. As he parted, he commended the work of the MHM warmly. I invited him to check out *The Naked Anabaptist* and its author who hails from the UK (Stuart Murray), as well as the global Anabaptist Network.

A psychiatrist, with roots in northern Ghana, but now based in Edmonton, was on a personal exploratory journey in the Lower Mainland that included the MHM. She spent at least four hours in the Gallery. Before she departed, she shared her perspective and impressions: "I think I am an Anabaptist Pentecostal," recounting the aspects which drew her in, and the intense tensions early in the Anabaptist movement, particularly during the Münsterite uprising.

After several hours of study, they asked a series of questions: "If someone were to take up arms, would s/he be excommunicated?"...

A Hooge clan, of about seven, came: "We are all Hooge-related, and intermarried. [He] is Filipino, married into the family, and is not familiar with this background." For much of the several hours, the Filipino guest studied the information with intensity while the rest were wandering, chatting and taking time out for coffee. He remarked about what he had read—basically all new to him, and the effect on him, as one who married into the Mennonite world. I felt compelled to share my association with the Philippine people, about our three visits to the Phillipines, including Mindanao, which he had also visited, and about my arranging to send home the body of Francisco, who died between Vancouver and Victoria enroute to a marine environment conference. His comment, "Thanks for what you have done for our people."

Another Hooge in-law spent much of her time walking the wall with her older mother, devotedly reading aloud the contents to her. One of the Hooge husbands identified Mr. Hooge on the story screen as a relative. He also located a book on the "For Sale" shelf, written by one of his uncles.

"We're from Scotland; we came to Abbotsford, from elsewhere in Canada, urged by our children." They were a fine, gracious and respectful couple. "We are Catholic," they mentioned at one point. After several hours of study, they asked a series of questions: "If someone were to take up arms, would s/he be excommunicated?" They also identified the issue around infant baptism early in the history of Anabaptism, which was a critical controversy at the time of Zwingli and the Swiss Brethren. Was the belief that infant baptism absolved the child from sin, or original sin? What do the variations of head coverings women wear, signify? and more—.

Two South African women, one from Johannesburg, the other currently living in Abbotsford, formerly from France and South Africa, believed that their faith identified strongly with the faith of the Anabaptists: "Our ancestry was also caused to migrate due to persecution for our beliefs." I took note that they gave particular attention to the introductory information about Mennonites. One of them captured much of the Gallery [on film] because they had limited time.

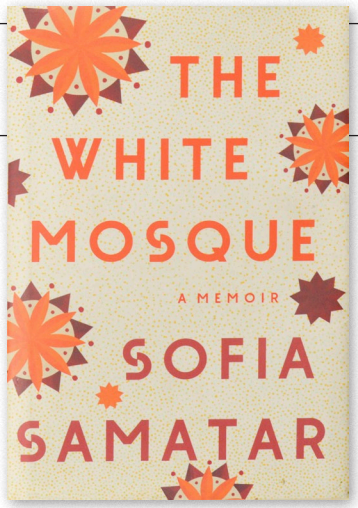
There were more: a married couple from near Bremerhaven in Northern Germany. Although they are affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church, they are fully familiar with the Anabaptist history, the migration from Bremerhaven, and the beautiful museum, the German Emigration Centre (Deutsches Auswandererhaus Bremerhaven), primarily established in memory of the Mennonites.

The Hamms, from Guelph, demonstrated their deep familiarity with the Mennonite faith, and his involvement in editing a book on Old Colony Mennonites, including their migration to Mexico and back to Canada. Two friends, with the husband of one in tow, from Altona, an epicentre of Anabaptist Mennonites, literally dwelt in the Gallery, feeling much at home and familiar with the environment.

There were more—I did not incorporate the Salvation Army guests from Whitehorse.

I ask, "Is this an indication of an Anabaptist resurgence—the sign of the 'Kingdom?' In the Gallery?" This is one day—at MHM.

Sofia Samatar. *The White Mosque: A Memoir.* New York, NY: Catapult, 2022. 315 pp.



■ **Reviewed by Robert Martens**

In the 1870s, Russian Mennonites, upset by government intrusion, were leaving their homeland for North America. No, said Claas Epp (1838-1913), go east, to Asia, to a place of refuge, where Christ will return—in 1889. And Mennonites from several colonies heeded his words of prophecy, setting off in wagon trains to follow Epp into Russian Turkestan. The journey, today sometimes called the Great Trek, was a disaster. Most of the young children died. Mennonites were murdered by marauding bandits. And Christ, of course, did not return. Some of the group split from Epp's group to settle in Aulie-Ata in present-day Kyrgyzstan. And some remained with Epp, accepting the invitation of the Khan of Khiva to live among Muslims in Ak Metchet, a village in what would become Uzbekistan. They stayed there until 1935, when Stalin's goons sent them to their deaths in exile.

What drew Sofia Samatar to join a tour group that followed the route of Epp's Mennonite trekkers? It was, she writes in *The White Mosque*, a "beautiful error." Samatar had seen a photo of a shimmering white church in Ak Metchet, and though the building was called a "white mosque" by the locals, it was in actuality the Mennonite church founded by Claas Epp's group.

Sofia Samatar was born to a Swiss Mennonite mother and Somali father. Her mixed heritage, she writes, sometimes provokes a kind of envy in her of those who have single roots, feel a particular identity, and can live stable lives. "What is any group identity but a story a whole community has swallowed?" she asks (103) Yet there's an advantage to not living at the centre, writes Samatar. She has had a "magpie existence," she says, always on the move, observing, thinking about whatever is on the periphery. "The magpie condition" is about "moving away from the main idea. It's a mode of thought opposed to any central argument or thesis" (82). As a young woman in a Mennonite high school, she yawned through Mennonite history classes—except for the story of Claas Epp's group. A story on the fringes of Mennonite history. A story often told with a sense of embarrassment.

The White Mosque is an amalgam: a travelogue of her tour group in Uzbekistan, of memoir, of history, of meditation. It's meant to be read in small bites. It travels through the wilderness journey, but is constantly peering sideways, at stories that may be as bizarre as that of Claas Epp. For example, Samatar writes of:

- von Kauffmann, of Austrian extraction, the first governor-general of Russian Turkestan, and an admirer of Mennonites and their German sense of order.
- the novelist Jung-Stilling, who wrote a fable about a journey to the east and to the kingdom of God. Claas Epp, to Jung-Stilling's bewilderment, accepted the novel as a sign from heaven.
- Wilhelm Penner, one of the trekkers, a camera hobbyist, who befriended a young Uzbeki boy, and taught him how to take photos. And what photos! The boy, Khudaybergen Divanov, grew up to be the first indigenous photographer in the region, and his images are works of art.
- Irene (pronounced Irenee) Worth, one of the great stage actors of the twentieth century. Her real name was Harriet Abrams, and she was a granddaughter of trekker Heinrich Abrams, murdered by bandits in Russian Turkestan.

The essays in *The White Mosque* shorten towards the end of the book to the point where they are mere snippets, brief breaths. These are often personal stories, told poetically. Ultimately, they constitute a plea to live together in peace, as Muslims and Mennonites did in Ak Metchet, despite their radical differences. It's vital, Samatar contends, that human beings do not live in blind imitation of each other. Of the Mennonite church she attends, she writes, "I would say our strength is that

we can't get everyone on the same page" (292). And of Claas Epp's trekkers, she writes that their failure brought about a kind of revelation. We, too, should be less concerned about success. "And how I love their wrongness. Their beautiful error. The collapse of their intent. It's failure that saves these wanderers from the old lines, the known gestures..."(297).

An interview by John Sharp with Sofia Samatar can be viewed on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBpypQZQKec

Jake Wiens. *Life's Ultimate Questions: Exploring the Stories that Shape Our Everyday.* Altona, MB: FriesenPress: 2023. (revised edition)

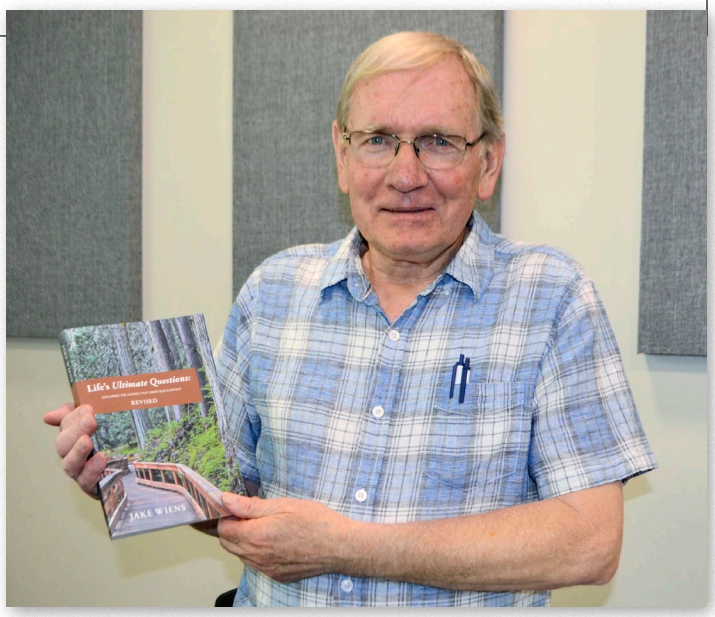
Reviewed by Robert Martens

Teacher, church-planter, and now author Jake Wiens was concerned about his nephew, who was stepping outside a relatively sheltered Christian home into a profoundly secular world. Wiens was well-acquainted with both church and non-church life, having taught in Cedars Christian School in Prince George as well as in the public system. "I started to ask the question how can we, the older generation, help the younger generation stay true to their convictions?" Wiens said to a local journalist. "That's when my promise was made to my nephew" (qtd. in Peebles 1). Wiens had already been journaling for years, and now he transformed the notes he had taken into a book, *Life's Ultimate Questions*—a kind of "guidebook" for his nephew, and for the young in general.

Wiens maintains that a Renaissance of "Religion" is urgently needed. It must be noted that, though Wiens is committed to the Christian faith, here he means "religion" in a cross-cultural context. He contends that human beings are inherently "religious," including atheists, that we all are seeking a meaning that transcends us and provides a sense of coherence to our lives. When religion is deleted from society—as is now happening in the West, Wiens writes—society itself will become our religion. Secular humanism will then often predominate, and the "spiritual quest," essential to understanding the "mystery within myself," will be deemed irrelevant.

In the author's own words:

> To avoid the topic of religion is to deny the core of our humanity and the mystery that embraces our short journey across life's stage. The unwillingness to discuss the topics that religion raises may be creating the informational vacuum that is at the root of so many of the volatile problems within our lives personally, as well as in our global community (40).



Jake Wiens with his book *Life's Ultimate Questions.* MHM book launch June 6, 2024. Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.

> We all need to work hard to eradicate … the modern version of fundamentalism, the focus on destroying the other, the outsider, labelled as unbelievers, heretics, infidels, ignorant dinosaurs from a bygone era, etc. This causes tremendous tensions within societies and terrible injustices and wars (74).

Secular humanism … is the religion shaping today's culture…. Even the Christian church has absorbed its influence without much awareness or resistance. The results have been nothing short of catastrophic if we had but eyes to see, and wisdom to connect the dots along history's unfolding timeline. The last fifty years of relative peace and prosperity in our corner of the world are simply proving to have been the calm before the 'final storm' (148).

Other Source

Peebles, Frank. "Local author showcases book at Art Space." *Prince George Citizen*, 14 June 2017. https://www.princegeorgecitizen.com/local-arts/local-author-showcases-book-at-art-space-3728498

Tribute to Mary Ann Quiring

■ By Richard Thiessen

Maryann Quiring, with her husband, Ernie, during her retirement luncheon. Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.

After over twenty-one and a half years, we are formally marking the end of Mary Ann's employment with the Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia. I think a number of us simply assumed that Mary Ann would always be here, and perhaps that will still be the case, but for now we are marking the conclusion of Mary Ann's employment with the Society.

Mary Ann began her employment with MHSBC on 1 May 2002. Loretta Krueger had resigned and moved on to work at Columbia Bible College, and Mary Ann, who had been a volunteer for the Society, was hired to work three days a week. I am not sure when Mary Ann began her volunteer work, but I know that it goes back at least to the last century—1999.

Back in 2002, the Archives were located at Garden Park Tower. The Society's operations were housed in five different rooms. We had one climate-controlled room for the archival collection, a main office and research library, two additional offices—one for the archives volunteers and another that held our microfilm collection and reader—and a storage room. It was, as one could say, a cozy environment, and Mary Ann's desk was pretty much Grand Central Station. Mary Ann worked alongside Hugo Friesen during those early years and later with David Giesbrecht.

Mary Ann came to be the fount of all knowledge. If there was a question, the general response was, "Ask Mary Ann, she will know." In many ways Mary Ann was the glue that held everything together. She helped coordinate the volunteers who were working on various projects, worked with the Society treasurer to make sure that all the bills were paid and the books were kept, and assisted the director with whatever tasks needed to be completed.

I have two memories of Mary Ann's time at Garden Park Tower that are stuck in my mind. One afternoon we were getting ready for what I think was a board meeting in the evening. We had a coffee maker near the lunch table and I was sitting nearby while Mary Ann was doing her usual whirling around, dashing here and there to get things set up. All of a sudden, in the midst of the whirlwind, there were coffee grounds flying everywhere. We still talk about that incident. On another occasion, I stopped by the Archives on my way home from work at Columbia Bible College to pick something up or sign a paper. I would park off Clearbrook Road, walk up the exterior steps, and enter the Archives through the glass exterior door. I came after hours one afternoon and Mary Ann had already left for the day. As I walked towards her desk, I came across drawers open and papers lying everywhere. I was convinced that we had been robbed and that someone had rifled through her desk looking for money. It turned out that Mary Ann had been frantically looking for something just before closing time and had rushed out, thinking that no one would see until she came the next day to clean everything up. We still have a good laugh over that one.

I was happy that Mary Ann was going to move with the Society to the Museum in 2015. There Mary Ann worked for both the Historical Society and the Museum, and just as she already had for the Historical Society, she took ownership of the Museum as well, and was committed to both organizations. She was in many ways still the glue that held everything together.

Mary Ann has always demonstrated a very high level of dedication to her work, and to MHSBC. It is obvious that she loves the Society and the people that she has worked with. Mary Ann is tenacious when she needs to be, and always did her best with whatever tasks she was given.

I know that Mary Ann had the tremendous support of her husband, Ernie. I know that the two of them

would work together after hours to make sure that the books were balancing. Ernie helped us with some of our IT needs, especially with our microfilm scanner, and made a great contribution to the Museum as well, building replica furniture for the house barn and helping with Christmas Market setup. Ernie, I want to thank you for your support of our Historical Society and of the Museum.

Mary Ann, thank you for your work with the Historical Society. You have left a lasting legacy and you have helped shape the Society into what it is today. For many of our members, you are the face of the Society, and that's a good thing!

You have kind of been like my big sister, and I could always bounce ideas off you and get your honest feedback—sometimes a bit too honest! I have always appreciated your friendship and your support, and I am thankful for that.

Mary Ann and Ernie, we want to wish you God's richest blessings as you move into retirement. Thank you again for who you are and what you have brought to us in terms of your talents and abilities, and most of all, your love for the Society and for us.

A Tribute to My Friend, Mary Ann

■ **By Waltrude Nickel Gortzen**

I first met Mary Ann about twenty-five years ago when MHSBC was still at Garden Park Tower and quickly realized that she was extremely knowledgeable, as well as hilarious and witty. A force of nature with a big heart and a giant funny bone!

At the instigation of a friend, I had started to work on my family tree and that led me to find MHSBC and meet Mary Ann. After that our paths would cross on and off, here and there, always parting with at least one good laugh. After I moved to Abbotsford, every time we saw each other, she would not forget to ask… "Can I add you to my list of MHSBC volunteers now?"

It finally happened in January 2015.

Mary Ann was so welcoming and patient with me, teaching me about genealogy, research and Mennonite history. She invited me into her home or we stayed late at the Museum so we could work on connecting, correcting and updating my family tree in the GRANDMA database. While we were working on my family tree, she also noticed how poorly information about Brazilian Mennonites was recorded and promptly put me to work sorting it out: I have been doing just that ever since, checking if the listed father is actually a brother and if the husband really only had one wife, and let's not forget that Francisco is still very much alive.

Mary Ann knows where everything is. **NOTHING** is ever truly lost unless Mary Ann can't find it. She knows all the books in the MHSBC libraries and calls them her babies. She can tell the best stories, and she assures us that nothing is better than her daily bowl of borscht—which she will probably miss the most.

Mary Ann… we all thank you for accepting us with grace and humour even when our ignorance could sometimes not be hidden. We all wish you a very happy and well-deserved retirement.

With heartfelt appreciation and a big hug!

P.S. To prevent the unimaginable possibility of boredom, genealogy snacks will still be provided.

In Memoriam: Max Shtatsky (1987-2024)

■ **By Louise Bergen Price**

Max Shtatsky, a young Ukrainian historian, was killed in action near the Donbas area of Ukraine on 12 February 2024. He leaves behind his wife, Daria, and young daughter, Vasilisa.

Since childhood, Max Shtatsky had been fascinated by stories of the Mennonites who once lived in the area. In 2010, after graduating from the Zaporizhzhia National University with a degree in history, he was hired by the Khortytsia National Reserve

Max Shtatsky. Photo source: facebook.com/max.shtatsky/

(KNR) in Zaporizhzhia. His interest in Mennonite history led him to excavate the foundation of an abandoned building in Chortitza where he found the remains of more than one hundred gravestones with Mennonite names. After being excavated and restored, the gravestones were stored at the National Reserve, where Shtatsky organized the building of a special memorial that displayed seven of the restored stones.

A second project on Chortitza Island involved the Jacob Hoeppner monument. The original monument had been moved to the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum in Steinbach in 1973. Shtatsky and his group located the base of the monument and had two replica stones made to celebrate the lives of Hoeppner, his wife, Sara (Dueck), their son, Jacob, and Jacob's wife, Anna (Brandt).

Shtatsky's final project, to find the missing pieces of the 1789-1889 Centennial monument that once stood in the centre of Chortitza, was interrupted by the Russian invasion. In 2022, Shtatsky joined Ukraine's armed forces to protect his homeland. Shortly after a visit with his wife and young daughter in February 2024, he was killed in action.

Max Shtatsky's Facebook page, with tributes in English, German and Ukrainian, is a testament to the influence his life and work had on Mennonites all over the world. He had corresponded with many who were interested in Mennonite history via email and Facebook, and was always willing to answer questions. For those interested in helping to support his wife and daughter, donations can be sent to the Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine website, with a note that the funds are to go to the Shtatsky family.

Source

Toews, Werner. "Shtatsky, Max (1987-2024)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Shtatsky,_Max_(1987-2024)

Max Shtatsky with the tools and supplies used for the restoration of the Mennonite headstones located in 2019 in Upper Chortitza.

Photo Source: Mennonite Genealogy and History Facebook Page.

Roots & Branches

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my garden and I converse in haiku

by Magdalene van der Kamp

Watercolour of a sweet pea flower by Magdalene van der Kamp

Flowers and watercolour have long been my passion together. Sweet peas, especially, are my love. Fragile as they are, they pull themselves up, their tendrils latching onto each other and a trellis for a hold. So do people. My fingers no longer nimble enough for watercolour, I have turned to haiku.

These short poems also celebrate the interplay of life.

dewladen lilac
bends to me at dawn
spills fragrance

peony petals
a scatter of pink
how lucky the ground is

rascally parsley
roots randomly
any old bed

lily of the valley
necklace of pearls
pernicious weed

sweet pea tendrils search
where is that trellis
you promised

yo! oregano!
your shameless propagation
annoys herb neighbours

already tulips
strut their stuff
cheeky chorus line

sweet pea tendrils
her newborn
grasps my finger

Magdalene van der Kamp is a retired teacher and mother of six children, a trellis for them as they grew. She lives in Sidney, BC, with her husband. Her mother, Anna Voth-Barwich, born in Siberia, loved flowers.