Vol. 31 No. 1
February 2025

Roots & Branches

Periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

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

Third Baptism. The Limmat River in downtown Zurich, with the spires of Grossmünster Church in the distance. Scene of the martyrdom of Felix Manz, one of the early Anabaptists, by drowning in this river. Watercolour. Artist: Gareth Brandt, part of his Stories of the Anabaptists series.

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Editorial

■ By Maryann Tjart Jantzen

1525-2025: It's been five hundred years since the origins of the Anabaptist movement. In recognition of this important anniversary, this year's issues of Roots and Branches will feature articles exploring the significance of Anabaptism.

Looking back at Anabaptism's long history, we may tend to view it through a distilled lens, seeing a straightforward connection between its Swiss origins and Menno Simons in Holland and onward to the beliefs associated with our Mennonite heritage. And we may largely associate early Anabaptism with the martyrdom of those who would not relinquish their beliefs. But the origins of the Anabaptist movement were anything but straightforward, with many variations, some violent and even surreal. As Robert Martens writes in his article, "The genesis of these radical church reformers can be described as a whirlpool of conflicting ideas, opinions, and beliefs, occasionally coalescing into basic principles agreed upon by a majority." Despite these turbulent beginnings, today there is still much to appreciate about this movement. As Gareth Brandt contends in his book *Radical Roots: A Collection of Paintings, Stories, and Poems Celebrating the 500th Anniversary of Anabaptist Origins*, "the Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage bears the significant and admirable markers of peace, separation from the state, simplicity, community, and *doing* rather than just *believing*" (Martens, Brandt review), markers we might pay attention to in this vexatious age.

In addition, in recognition of the opening of the *Unearthing the Vanished: Mennonite Experiences in Stalin's Great Terror* exhibit in May of this year, this issue also includes an article on the brutality of Stalin's reign that affected so many of the Mennonites who remained in the Soviet Union after 1930, Mennonites who were inheritors, though not always faithful adherents, of the nonresistant Anabaptism promoted by Menno Simons (See Louise Price's article in *Roots and Branches*, June 2024).

So in 2025, we will celebrate a significant movement that despite its inconsistencies has created a lasting legacy and also commemorate the horrors that so many experienced during Stalin's rule. We would do well to remember both, and by doing so challenge ourselves to apply Anabaptist "markers" during both peaceful and troubling times.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

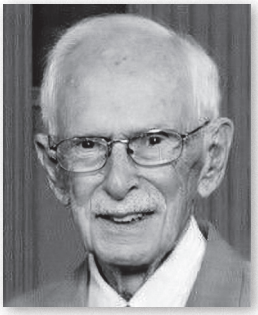
- The must-see *Hearts of Freedom: Stories of Southeast Asian Refugees* exhibit, curated by Stephanie Stobbe, continues at the Mennonite Heritage Museum until April 25th.
- The Mennonite Heritage Museum will present the exhibition: *Unearthing the Vanished: Mennonite Experiences in Stalin's Great Terror, 1937/38,* starting in May and throughout the summer months. The opening reception will be May 8, 2025. (See insert for more information.)
- The Mennonite Historical Society Annual General Meeting will take place this spring: date to be announced.

The Upside-Down Story of Early Anabaptism

By Robert Martens

Menno Simons, replying to accusations against Anabaptists: "No one among them is allowed to beg. They take to heart the needs of the saints. They entertain those in distress. They take the stranger into their houses. They comfort the afflicted; assist the needy; clothe the naked; feed the hungry; do not turn their face from the poor." (208)

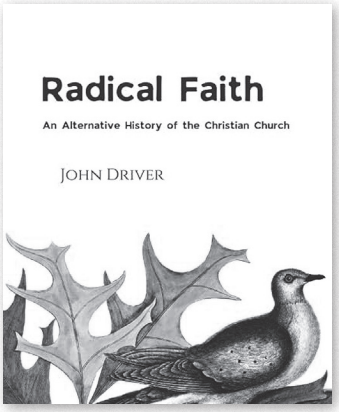
On the five hundredth anniversary of the Anabaptist-Mennonite story, it's expected that we return to the origins of the movement, so convoluted, so contradictory, and so inspiring (most of the time). The question has often been asked, "what is a Mennonite?" Unanswerable, of course, considering all the variations. The same could be said of Anabaptism. The genesis of these radical church reformers can be described as a whirlpool of conflicting ideas, opinions, and beliefs, occasionally coalescing into basic principles agreed upon by a majority. How to make sense of all this? An interesting place to gain an overall perspective might be the writing of John Driver, community development worker, pastor, teacher, church planter—and rebel.



John H. Driver.
Photo source: Obituary – *The Elkhardt Truth.*

An alternative history

John H. Driver was born in Newton, Kansas, in 1924. He married Bonita Landis in 1946, and together they worked for decades in the Spanish-speaking world, first in Puerto Rico, then in Montevideo, Uruguay, where John worked as professor of church history and New Testament studies in the Inter-Mennonite Seminary. They were likely shaped far more by their Latin experiences than by their Swiss Mennonite heritage. John Driver was impassioned in his belief that the Gospel meant good news for the poor and oppressed, that the real church stands in opposition to the violent forces that govern human history. In 1989, the couple retired to Goshen, Indiana. John died in 2022; he was predeceased by his wife, Bonny.



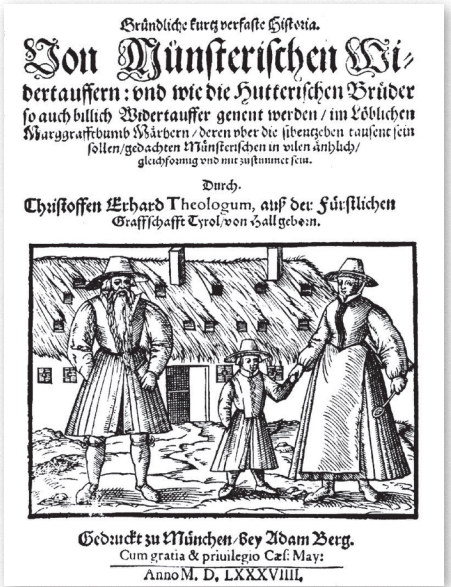
One of the several books John Driver wrote is a church history written thematically from "the bottom up": *Radical faith: An Alternative History of the Christian Church*. In the preface, he writes that this is the story of "outsiders," or "little ones," in the words of Christ. The typical approach to church history, he argues, is written from the perspective of the institution, or dogma, or geography, biography, or the development of worship. *Radical faith*, he writes, will not deal with ecumenical councils, or institutional discussions. The Roman emperor Constantine, who consolidated Christianity as the state religion, will not play a leading role in this story. The book is a history of radical Christians: "radical" in the sense of the word's derivation, *radix*, "root." "Radical" is also understood in this book

in the "conservative" sense, as a radical restoration of the essence of the church. Early Anabaptism undoubtedly belongs to this category, and the book devotes two chapters to its story.

Anabaptism in a Zwinglian context

> *"My Lords [the Council] will decide how to proceed henceforth with the Mass. (Ulrich Zwingli 181)*

In 1518, Ulrich Zwingli, a Swiss priest who had contacts with the brilliant Church thinker Erasmus, was appointed parish priest in Zurich. Zwingli was an early dissident who came to the conclusion that Scripture rather than the institutional Church should be authoritative. Soon a group of thinkers gathered around him, such as Conrad Grebel who had patrician roots but partied excessively and dropped out of college; Felix Manz, the illegitimate son of a priest; and Georg Blaurock, an ex-priest educated at the University of Leipzig. Standing before the Zurich Council, Zwingli advocated for a "common Mass" in which bread and wine are shared, not as a sacrament but as a sign of unity in God. The Council refused. Zwingli buckled: "My Lords will decide…" But Simon Stumpf, one of the group of dissidents, responded with anger: "You have no authority to place the decision in the hands of My Lords; for the decision is already made, the Spirit of God decides" (qtd. in Driver 181). Anabaptism was in the pangs of birth. One night, Grebel, Manz, and Blaurock secretly were rebaptized, as adults ("Anabaptist" simply means rebaptized), within their own seditious group.


Gründliche kurtz verfaste Historia.

Von Münsterischen Widertauffern: vnd wie die Hutterischen Brüder so auch billich Widertauffer genent werden / im Löblichen Marggraffthumb Märhern / deren vber die sibentzehen tausent sein sollen / gedachten Münsterischen in vilen ähnlich / gleichförmig vnd mit zustimmet sein.

Durch

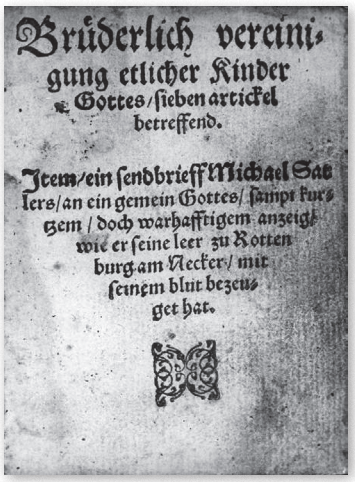
Christoffen Erhard Theologum, auß der Fürstlichen Grafschafft Tyrol von Hall geborn.

Gedruckt zu München / bey Adam Berg.
Cum gratia & priuilegio Cæs: May:
Anno M. D. LXXXVIIII.

Bill of Impeachment. Writings published by the antagonistic Catholic priest Christoph Erhard in 1589, containing much information (and misinformation) about Hutterites in Moravia.

Image source: Wikipedia. orgwikiHutterites; *The Golden Years of the Hutterites* by Leonard Gross, 1980, p. 141.

All this took place against a background of severe social unrest. Peasants were rising up against the mandatory payment of taxes and tithes; Driver suggests that social issues may have been the primary cause of concern for authorities, not religious doctrine. In 1525, what has sometimes been called the Great Peasants' War occurred. It might better be called the Great Peasants' Massacre, since one hundred thousand peasants were slaughtered by imperial forces, who suffered a handful of losses. Among the rebels was Thomas Müntzer, who certainly qualified as an early Anabaptist. He was captured at the Battle of Frankenhausen, tortured, and executed.


Brüderlich vereinigung etlicher Kinder Gottes / sieben artickel betreffend.

Item / ein sendbrieff Michael Sattlers / an ein gemein Gottes / sampt kurtzem / doch warhafftigem anzeigk wie er seine leer zu Rotten burg am Necker / mit seinem blut bezeuget hat.

Schleitheim Confession title page ca. 1560.
Scan courtesy of Mennonite Church Archives USA-Goshen. Gameo.

Meanwhile, Bolt Eberli was burned at the stake for his religious/political beliefs. Eberli was the first Anabaptist martyr in Switzerland. Conrad Grebel died of the plague. Felix Manz was drowned in the Limmat River while his wife called out encouragement to him. Blaurock was whipped out of Zurich and later burned at the stake. By 1527, writes Driver, Anabaptism seemed to be on the verge of collapse. The Anabaptist response was to gather secretly at Schleitheim and write a confession that clearly stated their beliefs. Adult baptism, the common communion, non-violence, the separation of believers from the state, and the refusal to take the oath were all affirmed. In a document accompanying the Schleitheim Confession, advice was given to meet often, discuss respectfully, and to avoid gluttony.

It was a Martyrs Synod. Most of those who wrote the Confession, all of them young, idealistic, and rebellious, met early and vicious deaths at the hands of a panicking Church and hysterical authorities. There was some reason for this. The Turks were threatening Europe, and dissent, even a commitment to non-violence, was perceived as a menace to the prevailing order. Michael Sattler, a leading voice at Schleitheim, endured a puppet trial, during which he said that it was not ethical to resist the Turks. Sattler was horribly tortured and burned at the stake.

The unrest continued. Europe was changing at an astounding speed, and the Anabaptists were at the heart of the movement towards human, civil, and religious rights. Women, well-acquainted with being "outsiders," were actively involved in the spread of the dissident gospel. In Tyrol, peasants and the urban poor were restive. Hans Hut, perhaps the most successful Anabaptist evangelist of his time, preached the new gospel, along with his own apocalyptic leanings. The gentle scholar, Hans Denck, who studied under Erasmus, proclaimed a more inward, spiritual form of Anabaptism, but even his reconciliatory nature could not protect him from state barbarity; he died of the plague in 1527 after being forced into writing a very ambivalent "confession." In Nikolsburg, then located in Moravia and now in the Czech Republic, the remarkable Anabaptist Balthasar Hubmaier found some security under the protection of the lords of Lichtenstein. Within a year, twelve thousand Anabaptists were living in Nikolsburg. The Anabaptists divided briefly here into *Schwertler*, those who carried a sword, and *Stabler*, who carried a staff; in the long run, the non-violent segment would win out. The Turks were still threatening to invade Europe, though, and in 1528 Hubmaier was burned at the stake, and his wife drowned. The same for Jakob Hutter, leader of the Hutterites, and his wife: burned, and drowned, in 1536. Initially, the Hutterites had lived with their goods in common, writes Driver, for pure survival. Today Mennonites may consider them to be on the traditionalist wing, but Hutterites, in the later 1500s, were progressive in terms of education and medicine.

Anabaptists were nearly driven to extinction in southern Europe. In middle Europe, they disappeared altogether as a viable force. The movement would now shift northwards.

Anabaptism in the Low Countries

> *"Then I, without restraint … renounced all my worldly reputation, name and fame, my unchristian abominations, my masses, infant baptism, and my easy life, and I willingly submitted to distress and poverty under the heavy cross of Christ." Menno Simons (197)*

Threads of violence also ran through the early Anabaptist movement in the Low Countries. Its beginnings were subversive but peaceful: "Sacramentalists" were meeting to celebrate common communion, and were insisting that the Mass was purely commemorative, that Jesus' blood and flesh did not literally exist in the wine and bread. But apocalypticism was raising its head, as often happens during troubled times. Melchior Hofmann, charismatic and committed, preached his prophetic millennial visions to anyone who would listen. He was not an Anabaptist at the start, but became a proponent of the cause sometime after 1530. The Melchiorite movement spread quickly in the Low Countries where, as in much of Europe, peasants and the urban poor had decided to take a stand against oppression. The first martyr in the Lowlands was Sicke Snijder, a Sacramentalist-Anabaptist who was executed in 1531. During the execution, a drummer stopped, shouted protests, and disappeared into the crowd. A young priest by the name of Menno Simons took note.

The militant wing of Anabaptism were loud and open in their cause, despite the obvious dangers, and a new leader, Jan Mathijs, was vigorously stirring up trouble. Even followers of the peaceful and spiritually-minded Anabaptist Obbe Philips, a barber-surgeon, acted heedlessly—they marched through Amsterdam shouting, "The new city is given to the children of God" (201). All were executed. Then, forty Melchiorites stormed the city hall in Amsterdam. Obbe Philips was horrified, and left the movement altogether in 1539.

Menno Simons. A 1608 engraving by Christoffel van Sichem.
Image source - Wikipedia.

Most Anabaptists in the Low Countries were of course not violent revolutionaries. But then the catastrophe at Münster happened. Under the leadership of Bernhard Rothmann, Jan Matijs, and Jan Beukel, the city was taken over by violent militants. The city was besieged. Starving residents went mad. Polygamy was permitted; the city was ruled by twelve "elders or judges of the tribes of Israel" (204). The populace, convinced of its righteousness, awaited the imminent return of Christ. In 1535, the "New Jerusalem" was occupied by the besieging

army. A massacre followed that lasted two days. In the aftermath, Hofmann was imprisoned, and died in his cell in 1543.

The shock of Münster to Europeans might be compared to the trauma suffered by Western citizens after the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York in 2001. In Europe, even today, Anabaptism bears the stigma. Menno Simons had been living a life of non-involvement. He wrote, "The two young men … and I spent our time emptily in playing [cards] together, drinking, and in diversions as, alas, is the fashion and usage of such useless people" (qtd. in 206). Menno, though, had been studying Scripture and connecting with others in the Anabaptist movement. He was still young, but thoughtful: though he could not countenance the oppressiveness of the old order, he would not commit himself to violent activist unrest. An event then occurred that clearly shook him up. A group of Anabaptist Melchiorites took over a monastery near Witmarsum. Imperial troops attacked, killing three hundred—and among the dead was Peter Simons, possibly Menno's brother.

For the next nine months, Menno continued in his profession, but he must have felt the agonies of conscience. In 1536, he left the priesthood and eventually was recognized as the leader of peaceful Anabaptists in the Low Countries. His followers were soon known as Mennonites: *menisten* in the Dutch language. It was a hard life for Menno and his wife, Gertrud: "When [other preachers] are greeted as doctors, lords, and teachers by everyone, we have to hear that we are Anabaptists, bootleg preachers, deceivers, and heretics…. In short, while they are gloriously rewarded for their services with large incomes and good times, our recompense and portion must be fire, sword, and death" (qtd. in 207).

Between 1535 and 1541, more Anabaptists were martyred than Calvinist and Lutheran martyrs combined. A bounty of five hundred gold florins was placed on Menno Simons' head. Still, Simons and his family lived in relative peace during their final years, enjoying the protection of a noble, Bartholomew von Ahlefeld. Perhaps their retreat here was a harbinger of things to come. Wherever it was possible, Anabaptist-Mennonites sought protection from those in power, worked hard, kept the faith as they could, and held their tongues. They became "the quiet in the land."

Source

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THREE BRITISH COLUMBIA MENNONITE WOMEN: DIVERSITY IN ACTION

Anna Friesen—*Chiropractor and Midwife*

■ **By David F Loewen**

Anna (Giesbrecht, Wiebe) Friesen was born 28 October 1885 in Reinfeld, Yazykovo, South Russia to Johann Giesbrecht and Elizabeth (Krause) Giesbrecht. Anna was the fourth oldest of fourteen children. John Friesen was born 27 April 1886 in Friedensfeld, Zagradovka, South Russia, to Bernhard and Anna (Penner) Friesen, the seventh of eleven children.

Anna and Johann Friesen.

About 1907, Anna married Johann Wiebe and brought a son, Heinrich, born out of wedlock, into the marriage. Together she and Johann had six children, three of whom survived infancy. Johann died of typhus in 1919. The next years were perilous for Anna and her young family. Robbed of everything by gun-toting

John & Anna Friesen, among the first Mennonite settlers in Abbotsford, arrived in 1931 in this vehicle (see the picture below). The vehicle was a converted farm truck, owned by a local farmer in Herbert, Saskatchewan. He removed the grain tank from his truck and converted it into a bus, constructed of wood. The bus held 18 passengers, with two or three in the cab. Apart from the Friesen party of eight and the driver(s), it is unknown who else may have travelled with them. The narrow, windy highway #3 was all gravel through the mountains, and whenever an oncoming vehicle was encountered, one vehicle would have to reverse to the nearest wide spot in the road to allow the other to pass. The grade was often such that all passengers would have to get out and sometimes pushing was required. Travelling long hours each day, the trip from Herbert, Saskatchewan to Sardis, BC, took a full week.

soldiers, Anna and her children, like many other Mennonites at this time, experienced severe privation. As a last resort, Anna relented and allowed her son Willie to beg for food. He was chased from properties, including those of wealthy Mennonites, where he was denied even the rotten potatoes from their compost piles. These experiences would shape Anna Friesen's level of generosity for the rest of her life; she vowed that no one would ever go hungry if she could do anything about it.

In 1925, Anna and her three children were presented with the opportunity to immigrate to Canada. Son Heinrich, who was married to a Russian woman, and had been conscripted into the Russian army, was therefore unable to accompany them. It was not until the 1970s that Anna learned of his death (execution) in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Anna was heartbroken from never seeing her son again. Anna's own parents and most of her siblings had emigrated to North America in 1910, and some even earlier.

Anna and her three children arrived in Quebec City aboard the *SS Minnedosa* in 1925. They made their way to Steinbach, Manitoba, where her brother John lived. Within a year of arriving in Steinbach, Anna learned of John B. Friesen, a widower with four children who had recently arrived from Mexico. John and his first wife, Gertrude Siemens, had moved to Mexico, where Gertrude died in 1925. In 1926, John and his four children returned to Canada. Within weeks of being introduced to each other, John and Anna were married in June 1926. John and Anna had one child together, Anne. It was with Anna's coaching that John assisted in the delivery of their baby.

According to a family member, Anna had always

Pictured here, starting with the young lad to the right of the men: Ben Friesen, Henry (Hank) Friesen, holding onto his back is Anne Friesen (John and Anna's only child), Katie Friesen, the next four women unknown, then Nita Wiebe (Anna's daughter from a previous marriage), and Leni Friesen. Anna's two oldest children, Elizabeth and Bill Wiebe remained in Manitoba.

shown a deep interest in the medical field. It is believed that Anna became aware at an early age that she was a healer, learning her craft from her own mother. She was a skilled midwife, providing this service in Russia during the precarious times when medical assistance wasn't close by or available. It was a gift that she regularly exercised after arriving in Canada.

The family moved to Herbert, Saskatchewan, in 1928, where she continued to use her midwifery skills. In 1931, the Friesens moved again, this time to the Fraser Valley, being among the first Mennonites to settle in present-day Abbotsford. At that time, the area they settled in was referred to as Poverty Flats (later Clearbrook). The Municipality of Matsqui had set aside two blocks of land for Mennonite settlers, one block along Huntingdon Road and the other along present-day Clearbrook Road. These lands had been recently logged, leaving "…an inhospitable expanse of giant stumps and tangle of slash, criss-crossed by abandoned rail spur lines and twisting dirt trails" (Loewen 89).

This piece of art is based on a family photo of the original Townline Hill homestead on Maclure. The small girl in the foreground is Johann and Anna's daughter, Anne. The artwork is by Gordon Friesen, grandson of Johann and Anna Friesen.

The Friesens "lived in acute poverty" that first winter; government relief was available only to those residents who had lived one full year in British Columbia. John Friesen scoured the recently logged landscape for logs left behind which he cut into firewood and sold for $1/cord. Their seventeen-year-old daughter, Katie, had immediately moved to the *Maedchenheim* (a resource facility for young Mennonite women) in Vancouver, where she found domestic employment. Her earnings, sent home, provided critical financial assistance that first winter. Their government "relief" of $18 a month for a family of six was gratefully received the next year.

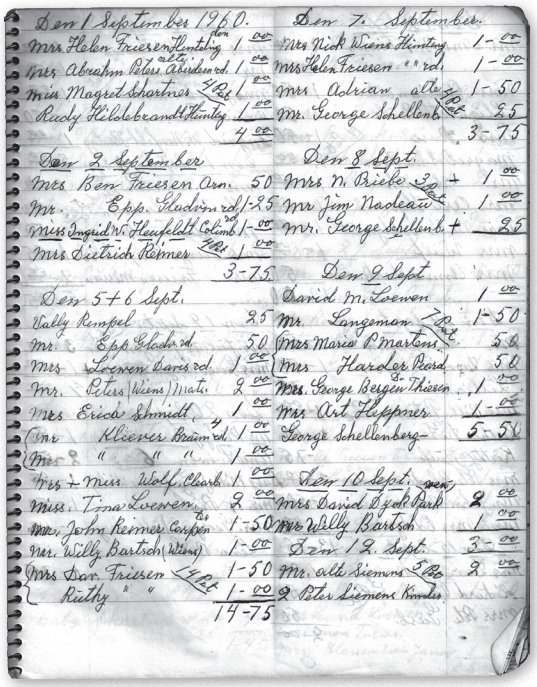
Twenty-acre parcels in Matsqui were reportedly selling for $100 to $200. John and Anna could not afford the price and therefore rented a house from a Sikh family after their arrival. Not long after, they became aware of available homestead acreages on Upper Maclure Road, west of Clearbrook Road. They applied for and were successful in securing a homestead (these acreages were affectionately referred to as "stump ranches") for the cost of a $2 registration fee on condition that they would break the land and make it profitable. Clearbrook Road was not much more than a cow path at the time and access to their parcel, three kilometres west of Clearbrook Road, was by way of a trail slashed through a swamp and up a steep hill (present-day Fishtrap Creek). The Friesens worked tirelessly at clearing the land and trying to make a living to support their family. According to their son Ben, any of his spare time outside of school was taken up with clearing land.

Their first house was built with lumber sold by Joseph Trethewey at his shuttered Mill Lake sawmill. John Friesen paid fifty cents for as large a wagonload as his horse could pull. Using cedar blocks for a foundation, round cedar poles for floor joists, shiplap for sheeting, second-hand windows and doors, and homemade cedar shakes from an old log found on the property, John built their house, measuring 20' x 20' with three rooms on the main floor and one large

Friesen homestead, ca. 1938. L. - R. John B. Friesen (417201), Heinrich Siemens (957128), _?_, Peter Warkentin (957108) (on stump), Anne Friesen Matthies (417202). Front: Liese Siemens Warkentin (957105), Tina Bargen Siemens (957113), Anna Friesen (369294), _?_.

room upstairs. The total cost was $10.00.

Basic supplies were available from a small general store about five kilometres away near the present intersection of Clearbrook Road and South Fraser Way. Travel was either by foot or horse. Under these conditions, Anna Friesen's midwifery skills were often called upon as it took too long to hail a doctor from Abbotsford. Until roads became more useable, many babies in this vicinity were delivered by Anna Friesen. Family accounts indicate she delivered a child in her Clearbrook home as late as 1960.



This is a page out of Anna Friesen's logbook in which she recorded names of customers, dates of visit, and amount paid for her chiropractic services. (This writer's name is entered as "David M. Loewen 1.00").

Eventually, the Friesens moved from their acreage to a lot on the corner of Old Yale and Clearbrook Roads in Clearbrook on which the Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI) would be built in 1943. It was at this time that Anna Friesen's occupation as "chiropractor" accelerated. She became more accessible to the wider community and established a very good rapport with her client base. Her reputation spread throughout the Fraser Valley and into Vancouver.

After selling their property for the construction of MEI, John and Anna Friesen moved to a house on Dueck Crescent, south of Clearbrook Mennonite Brethren Church (the street no longer exists), where she continued her chiropractic practice.

Anna Friesen was known as a bone-mender and bone-setter. She was self-trained as a reflexologist, working on pressure points in the feet. Anna did deep muscle massage, to the point where her thumbs became bent from years of pressing against hard muscles. Anna Friesen's granddaughter recalls that she had customers who drove all the way from California to get "fixed" by her (these very likely were family members). Her appointment books were kept meticulously. She jotted down names, dates, and payment, either in cash or produce. This writer was one of the regular customers who visited her often as a young boy and supplemented payment for her services with pie cherries picked on our farm. She may also have been paid with produce like cream or eggs, but most often she shared those kinds of payments with people in need.

She was particularly proud that she could help a large burly policeman with his ailments, despite her short stature. On another occasion, she treated an eight-year-old child who fell out of a cherry tree and broke her wrist. She set the bone and splinted it—no X-rays and no cast. Her "treatment" room had a distinctive smell of liniment and peppermint. Anna's chiropractic practice ended around 1970, after she had scaled back to only a few clients per week.

In the early years, John and Anna Friesen worshipped in homes with others, and in 1936, they were among the twenty-four members who formally organized as Clearbrook Mennonite Brethren Church (known as North Abbotsford Mennonite Brethren Church until 1950).

Anna Friesen's frugality and creativity are well illustrated by one of her practices. A Vancouver paper included a weekly sketch of a dress, the pattern for which could be purchased by mail. Anna Friesen would cut out the sketch, make some changes to the neckline, and add special details. She would then purchase the fabric and give it to a local seamstress, Katharina Klassen, to sew up—without the pattern. Leftover fabric was used by another local artisan to make a matching hat.

Anna was well-read, followed international news, and befriended local politicians. While gardening and baking occupied some of her time, helping people always came first. This was the result of the years she and her young family had suffered privation in Russia. She was quietly generous with anyone she saw or who came to her with a need. Her house was a depot for distributing clothing to the impoverished in the community. Her grandchildren recall that, whenever there was a family dinner at their grandparents' home, they were sent to deliver a

plate of hot food to the bachelor who lived in a shack in the field behind their house. That was how Anna Friesen lived her life.

Anna's sister Mary, who was never able to immigrate to Canada, lived in Bremen, Germany, with her husband. Anna paid her two visits, during which time she worked with the Red Cross in trying to locate her son Heinrich Wiebe. Not until the 1970s was she finally put in touch with Heinrich's two sons (her grandsons) living in the USSR, who were able to visit her in Canada before she passed away.

John became ill in the early 1970s and was admitted into Menno Home (Menno Place); Anna moved to Menno Home in 1972. John passed away in 1973 and Anna in 1981.

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Matthies, Charlotte. Correspondence with author, 15 Apr. 2023, 16 Apr. 2023, 22 Oct. 2023.

All photos by Gordon Friesen.

Robert Martens: As a teenager, I injured my ankle, possibly a sprain. For days I limped around until I was finally persuaded to visit the bonesetter living in Clearbrook. Anna Friesen articulated her healing methods for me, while I suppressed a smile at her naïveté. Clearly, this was a waste of time. Well, I was young, and I was the naïve one. Half an hour later, I walked briskly out her door and immediately went for a hike.

Charlotte Froese Fischer: *A Mennonite Woman in the Atomic Age*

By Robert Martens with Louise Bergen Price

As a computational scientist I am interested in using High-Performance Computing methodology for the accurate solution of the wave equations for multi-electron atoms of the periodic table. ("Charlotte Froese Fischer" UBC 1)

I was always expected to help at home, which meant that school for me was like a vacation. ("Charlotte Froese Fischer" Government 1)

Charlotte Froese Fisher.
Photo source:www.cs.ubc.ca~cff.

In July 1949, reports the *Chilliwack Progress*, Charlotte Froese received a $200 scholarship to further her education. Her marks were second highest in the province. Charlotte, the newspaper notes in the language of the day, was the daughter of "Mr. and Mrs. John D. Froese"—more properly, Johann and Helena (Thiessen) Froese—and lived at 754 South Sumas Road in the rural Greendale area. So, second highest, not quite at the top of the class, but Charlotte Froese Fischer would become known as a preeminent scholar in computational atomic structure theory. Not an easy accomplishment for a woman at that time, and particularly so for a Mennonite refugee who had to start at the bottom.

Charlotte was born September 21, 1929, in the village of Stara Mykolaivka, previously Pradivka, and before that, Nikolayevka, in the Donetsk region of Ukraine. She and her parents were passengers on the last train of Mennonites fleeing Russia before Stalin shut the doors to emigration. The family lived for a time in a refugee camp in Germany, then immigrated to Saskatchewan before they settled down in the Fraser Valley. "I do remember the poverty," Charlotte later said, "The only book in our family was the Bible. Going to school opened a whole new world to me" (Falk 2).

In 1952, Charlotte Froese achieved a BA in mathematics and chemistry at the University of British Columbia; math, she would recall, was easy but chemistry was her passion. Two years later she earned her masters, also at UBC, in applied chemistry. Her talent and passion then took her to Cambridge University, where her PhD supervisor was Douglas Hartree, well-known for the Hartree-Fock method which enabled scientists to "determine the properties of complex atomic systems made up of nuclei and electrons" (Falk 2). Charlotte then developed the method even further so that more complex systems could be determined. Scientific terminology can seem like a foreign language to the uninitiated, but it is reported that "the experimental discovery of the negative ion of calcium was motivated by her theoretical prediction of its existence" ("Charlotte" Wikipedia 1). Charlotte

threw herself into this work. "In the evening," recalls Carolyn Fischer, Charlotte's daughter, "the professors would have first crack at using the computer for their calculations, and then the grad students could use it in the wee hours of the night…. Everything was very formal in those days; everyone wore their robes. So she'd be cycling back and forth to the lab at night in her flowing black robe" (Falk 2).

Charlotte Froese Fischer at UBC in the 1950s.
Photo source: *Globe & Mail.*

Charlotte Froese began her professional career back at UBC, where she taught from 1957 to 1968 in the mathematics department and launched computer courses within the program; it must be remembered that computer technology was in its infancy at the time. In 1967 she married Patrick Fischer, a distinguished computer scientist and teacher at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. They had one daughter, Carolyn, who would find a career as an economist at the World Bank in Washington, DC. "They exchanged very sweet letters," says Carolyn of their romance, "with love messages encoded in equations" (Falk 3).

Charlotte and Patrick lived in Vancouver for one year, moved on to teach at the University of Waterloo which was developing its computer science program, then Pennsylvania University, and finally Vanderbilt. Along the way, Charlotte also worked at Harvard College Observatory in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and at Boeing in Seattle. Personal computers were still a rare thing, but Charlotte had a "home computer," a terminal that connected with her university's mainframe. "She'd start dinner," says Carolyn, "and then go and work on some of her code, forgetting about the pots on the stove. She melted a couple of pots that way" (Falk 3). Charlotte retired from the Vanderbilt faculty in 1996 at the age of seventy-five. The Fischers were married until Patrick's death in 2004. Charlotte died on February 8, 2024.

Charlotte Froese Fischer succeeded at a time when women were not welcome in the world of science. A colleague reports that a bias kicked in when he told friends he was working with her: "People would say, 'Are you kidding?' I understood later that that was just because she was a woman" (Falk 3). Nevertheless, in 1963 she was the first female to be awarded an Alfred P. Sloane Research Fellowship, and in 2016 she was elected to the Royal Society of Canada. She wrote more than three hundred articles on computational atomic theory. Lasers, atomic clocks, quantum computers, and GPS systems rely on the type of calculations in which she was involved.

Perhaps Charlotte Fischer's Mennonite background influenced her work life. Colleagues were family; she was a mentor to the young. And her appreciation for the freedoms and opportunities in Canada is typical of Mennonite refugees of the time. "She was very grateful to Canada for the opportunities that she had," says Carolyn. "She felt that made a huge difference in her life and career" (Falk 2).

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Hilda Born: *doing the right thing*

■ By Robert Martens

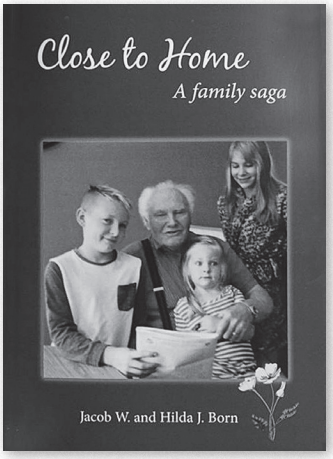
On April 24, 2024, Hilda Klassen Born died after a lifetime of writing, hard work, caring for others, and passion for her Mennonite heritage. She was born in the village of Blumenort, southern Saskatchewan, on July 24, 1930, to Johann and Maria Martens Klassen, both of whom came from the Mennonite colony of Zagradovka, South Russia. Hilda grew up on a prairie farm but moved with her family to another flatland, Matsqui Prairie. Here she trained to be a teacher, receiving her certificate in 1950, but her career was interrupted, as happened so often among Mennonites of the time, by her duties at home and on the farm.

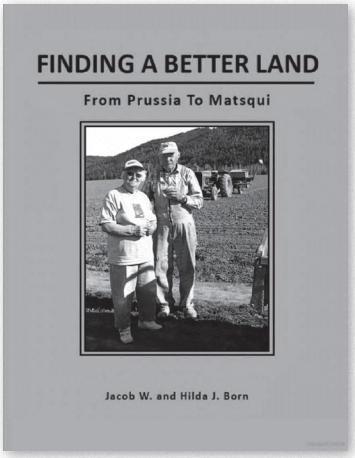
In 1953, Hilda married Jacob "Jake" Born; like Hilda, he was born in Canada to Russian Mennonite immigrants, this time in Sedalia, Alberta, in 1927. The two were married for almost seventy years. Hilda, though, seemed unstoppable; she furthered her education at Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute and earned a BA at the age of sixty-three. She had a lifetime of productivity but did not do so alone. Her obituary records, "With typing help from her husband Jake"—and certainly Jacob did more than just type—Hilda wrote eight books and published several hundred articles. Among her publications were *Finding a Better Land: From Prussia to Matsqui*, and *Close to Home: a family saga*, both co-written with Jacob.

Hilda Born - sitting in the light shining through her patio door during the pandemic.
Photo source: Julia M. Toews, 2021.

Both Hilda and Jacob assisted in the cleanup after the 1948 flood of the Fraser River, which devastated Matsqui in particular. Hard times seemed to be an impetus for both of them. The obituary once again: "Having experienced scarcity while growing up in the Great Depression, the destruction of the 1948 flood, and then severe rheumatoid arthritis (all before the age of 30), she pledged to the Lord that if he would give her strength, she would try to assist the weak, needy, and those ignored by others." Despite having parts of their property expropriated three times with minimal compensation, the couple loved their home in Matsqui.

Jacob died in 2023, and Hilda a year later. Their passion for doing the right thing will not be forgotten.





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The following article by Hilda Born vividly recalls the days of the COVID pandemic.

Pandemic Story

■ By Hilda Klassen Born

Every Sunday morning, Jake and I dress a little special for our church services, even if we can only fellowship by computer. For our Easter Sunday I wore my deep lilac top with a carved silver brooch. I noticed Jake, too, chose a fine dress shirt and even striped Sunday socks.

Our computer is downstairs beside the newly installed patio doors that let in lots of light. Through them we could see the back lawn, flowering hedge, and the bright sunny day that greeted us.

Just as church musicians began the majestic Easter hymns, we noticed a little bird picking away at the old rug beside the glass patio door. We guessed that the petite brown finch was probably hungry and finding seeds or insects for its breakfast. Diligently she kept at it and when we next glanced over, she was gone. But on the lawn a cheerful robin hopped about and looked our way. Beside the nearest bushes, a slightly bigger bird had come to visit, too. It wasn't a starling, but we could not identify it, and wished we could consult our ardent and knowledgeable bird-watching neighbour.

Before the bigger bird had disappeared, our little finch was back, and we realized that she was pulling tufts of fabric from the old outdoor rug and keeping them in her beak as she flitted away. When she returned once more, she was not alone, but had lured her partner to join her. His head and shoulders were ruby-tinged, and we realized that this young couple were busy preparing their nest with soft fabric from our faded old rug. They knew how to unravel a bit to use as cushioning for the eggs they expected to put into their cozy nest. We didn't mind sharing some threads for their future home.

Watching these busy birds while listening to the Easter message on Jesus' resurrection and seeing nature prepare for new life was emotionally moving. We felt that we received a double gift, first through music and song from human voices, and the added bonus from nature that God provided at that precise time.

In Matthew 6:26, Jesus points to "the birds of the air" as examples for us. They fly in their sphere and joyfully sing to cheer each other and us.

With these feathered friends beside us, we did not feel lonely or forsaken, though isolated from fellowship, in COVID Easter time, nor in the days following.

My Trip to Turkestan

(continuation and conclusion)

This is part 2 of a travelogue written by a Russian Mennonite (never fully identified) and published in Unser Blatt *in 1925.*

Translated by Robert Martens

Soon after my arrival the brothers began speaking highly of a ride through the mountains. I had two days of leisure. Soon a group of six men was formed: the 65-year-old elder of the Köppental Church, Brother Gerhard Kopper; Brother Wall; Brothers Abraham and Kornelius Dück; a graduate of the Chongrav Bible School, Brother Schirling; and myself.

At 10 am on a Friday morning we rode out of Köppental. I had been given a small Kyrgyz nag, gentle, and well-acquainted with climbing. I didn't feel a great deal of enthusiasm, sitting so high upon a horse, and calculating all the possibilities; I visually measured the distance from the back of the horse to the hard clay earth.

At first we rode over grey steppe and narrow canals towards the mountains, and after about a half-hour ride we had reached the "Steintal" [Rocky Valley]. Our goal was the narrow mountain pass—or, more accurately, the Karagoyn Gorge, dense with evergreen forest. We rode on the banks of the mountain stream, the Urumural, from which the villages draw their water for irrigation. A never-before-seen world opened up for me as we rode through a narrow crevice into the gorge. High, massive cliffs soared upwards over our path, looking as though they might crash with a huge roar at any moment. They rose both left and right, and down the middle plummeted the stream. In order to find the best

Mt. Elbrus in the Caucasus – from a 19th-century postcard.
Image source: Wikimedia commons.

Turkestan (Turkistan), [later] divided into a number of republics in Soviet Central Asia, [was] a former Russian government-general conquered by Russia in 1859-65, with the chief cities Tashkent, Bukhara, and Samarkand. In 1880 Mennonites from the Molotschna and Am Trakt Mennonite settlements came to Turkestan to establish settlements at Ak-Mechet in Khiva and Auli-Ata, under the leadership of Claas Epp and Abraham Peters. Under the Soviet regime Turkestan was broken up into the Kazakh, Kirghiz, Uzbek, Tadzhik, and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republics. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, these republics gained their independence. During and after World War II the former Turkestan received an influx of population from European Russia which included many Mennonites.

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route for the horses, we frequently had to ride through the water to reach the opposite bank where, for a brief time, the trail was better. We passed by great caves with low, narrow entrances. It was said that in one of these cave entrances, a Kyrgyz huntsman recently encountered a bear; it did not go well for either of them. At the call of the huntsman, several responded and killed the bruin, but the crushing embrace had so injured the "Nimrod" that he soon died.

The gorge continually meanders, so that it is difficult to see ahead. Around a corner, however, the gorge widens into the so-called Wide Valley, in which the cliffs hang back amidst huge land masses. Here the land is verdant on both sides of the stream, and all the flat sections are irrigated and cultivated by the Kyrgyz. Here one also encounters the dwellings of the Kyrgyz, but in summer they are abandoned, since all of the tribespeople are in the mountains; that is, at the high elevations with their herds. Only a few remain behind to look after the irrigation. The trails in the Wide Valley are better. At the trail's edge are tombstones of prominent Kyrgyz. The dead are buried intentionally at the very edge of the trail so that at world's end, when Mohammed rides through the world, he can find them.

The Wide Valley becomes ever narrower and soon is once again a gorge. Fine foliage grows on the banks of the Urumural, here and there a tree as well, and then wooded areas appear. Karagoyn is not far from here. The sun was setting. We wanted to reach the mountain hut, where Mennonites had grazed their cattle the previous year, before the onset of night. We arrived there in total darkness. An urgent matter was the tea kettle; we did not have one with us, having relied on Kyrgyz who were not hosting any guests, and they were not there. While we gathered brushwood for a fire to protect us against wolves and the cold, the Dück brothers rode ahead to find any Kyrgyz who might have a tea kettle.

After a half hour they returned, and luckily one of them was carrying a fearfully smoke-stained kettle in his right hand. Anyone lifting the lid and sniffing the kettle too closely was greeted with a variety of "fragrances"; one cannot be too choosy, however, when entering another culture with its claims. The kettle was quickly filled with cold water and set over the fire. The results were wonderful. Soon the aroma of *Schnetke* and *Zwieback* filled the air, and the banquet began. After hanging onto a horse all day, and then waiting two hours for dinner, a good appetite is the result. Of course, the kettle was filled and refilled with clear, pure water, and placed back over the fire.

Around midnight we made ourselves comfortable in the mountain hut and prepared for sleep. Solicitous friends had clipped a thick cotton blanket to my saddle but at such a high elevation it was very cold, and I slept little and badly.

After tea the next day, we continued our journey. My goal was to set foot upon snow that very day, and the brothers were agreeable enough to cater to my caprice.

The deepest chasms and steepest cliffs greeted us. One stretch of trail was particularly challenging. To the right, bottomless abyss; to the left, lofty mountainside—and a narrow trail, just wide enough for a small horse. Turning aside or back was impossible. For a time my right foot dangled over the deep precipice. At first I remained unafraid, but as the path did not widen, nor the precipice move aside, my courage began to waver. The others had little or nothing to say, and the little cavalcade proceeded in silence. I looked neither left nor right, but focused my gaze on the tips of my horse's ears. A sigh of relief escaped me as we left the dangerous passage behind.

We continued climbing, came once again upon the river, and saw a snow field directly before us. Because the horses could go no farther, we tied them up securely and clambered upwards over the scree. We soon reached a thick layer of snow, under which the river flowed. Further up on the slopes, an enormous variety of red, yellow and blue flowers bloomed on sunny meadows. We climbed with Brother Kopper, who soon turned back. I had in mind, however, to bring flowers back to my wife and children. It was steep climbing, but not too far. How the flowers flourished at such an elevation! How wonderful a meadow of flowers in the middle of a snow field!

Map showing the Caucasus & Turkestan regions @ 1970.
Source: *Mennonite Historical Atlas*, Schroeder and Huebert, p. 104.

After I had picked a handful of flowers, we climbed back down to the horses and proceeded down the return trail. For a long time we travelled the now familiar trail, then turned aside into a gorge in order to follow a shorter route over the mountain ridge. Here there were no deep chasms and sheer cliff faces, but we had to climb a steep mountain slope. The Kyrgyz call this path "the edgy" [*kriggelig*]; it leads upwards in a zigzag in which the horses lean over so greatly in order to maintain their balance that the rider is forced to right himself in the saddle. Our Turkestani brothers felt like genuine mountain men in such locales; Brother Schirling and I, much less so. I felt a certain happiness approaching the mountain ridge, hoping to have, even if only for a few moments, solid earth beneath one's feet. But when Brother Schirling had climbed the ridge and stopped at the peak, he yelled to me, "Don't climb too quickly, or you will find yourself tumbling down the other side."

I had imagined a wide plateau, free of vertiginous chasms, but found barely enough room to stand. In my disappointment I could think only of enduring a climb down the mountainside. This feeling lessened the pleasure of the magnificent outlook from such an elevation. Before us lay the valley dotted with village and forest; behind us, the mighty mountain peaks with their white turbans, and the setting sun. Looking over part of the world in such a way makes humans seem like tiny and diminutive beings.

The descent was quite prosaic; we had to climb down from our horses and lead them. My nag wished to gallop all the way down. As our strong R. Dück hung onto its tail, however, it soon lost all such desires, and joined the orderly pack. We arrived very late, at 10 in the evening, weary enough to fall asleep on the spot, but filled with new impressions. I am exceedingly thankful to the brothers who urged me to take this ride, and would absolutely recommend to anyone who comes to Turkestan to ride into the mountains; it is so rewarding to experience God's natural wonders and the power of His creation.

The next Sunday I joined for one last time the gathering of my brothers and sisters in their church building. On Monday I left the settlement, where for one week I had enjoyed their warm hospitality and love. God bless the settlement and its settlers …

I had read Bartsch's account of the outmigration several times. All this now came to life for me. Much could be learned here from elderly brothers who had joined the outmigration as fathers of families or as 20-year-old

youths. To reflect on the seventeen-week trek, the hardships of travel over desert sands or flat steppes without water, or of the very uncertain future, is to be astonished over the brothers' dauntless faith. They have made many difficult sacrifices for their principle of nonresistance …

The route home took me to Moscow through Pishpek and Tashkent. On July 3 I returned well in body and soul to my loved ones.

Ad.

The Calamitous Terek River

■ **By Ryan Adrian**

The Calamitous Terek River runs through the history of my people,
And their adventurous spirit, into which I was born.
Pioneers of dust and dreams, faith and agony,
The river moves with the eddies and slipstream
Of We, the people, who lived along its shores:
Kalmyks, Tatars, Nogais, Cossacks who moved with the current,
To a home on the Caspian Sea.
From whence my grandmother was born in the year 1903
Into a maelstrom of shifting tides, clashing ideals,
From the tip of Mount Elbrus, seen from village number four,
To the local village shepherd lost as Prisoner of the Caucasus.
And stories and legends abide, on the river's side;
Of Tolstoy and White Russians, Hadji Murat,
Khassav-Yurt and the market square,
The brawling tavern for militiamen and where
My grandmother sold her wares.
Silk and sash, scimitars and noble pride,
Headless horsemen fight to die.
The guardians of strangers: Elbrus,
Zeus of the Caucasus, watches its minions from up high;
From the North; the Monastics, priests of Orthodoxy
From the South; Ottomans and Turks
From the East; the Khan, descendants of Genghis
From the West; Mennonites and Anabaptism enter the fray.
Farmers, horsemen, shepherds, soldiers, preachers and Sharifs;
We all partake on this journey of the river called Terek.
But wait! What's this I hear. In the twilight
A rolling whirlpool as the moon casts a beam!
A Brave on the hunt for wild boars, or pheasant
A flash of steel as the knife plunges in
The river carries him on its back,
Will it carry me too?

Ryan Adrian grew up in Abbotsford and currently makes his home in Winnipeg where he is involved in the local arts scene. He has a strong interest in the arts and history with particular fascination with the Anabaptist/Russian Mennonite story. Drawing from his grandma's personal memoirs and with the inspiration from the great Russian writers, Tolstoy, Gogol et al., the cauldron of ethnic tribal conflict in the Terek Mennonite colony fuels the drama and saga in this poem.

See stories on Terek in Roots and Branches*, Feb. 2023.*

We Will Remember Them

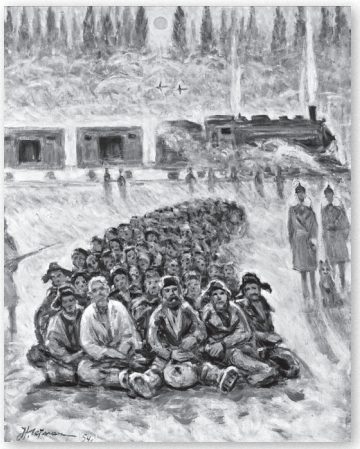
Martin Amis: *Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million*

■ **By Robert Martens**

Zachto?—Why?—This is the question posed by Martin Amis in his brilliant and angry dissection of Stalinism, *Koba the Dread*. And this was the question, he writes, asked by the tens of millions who were murdered by Joseph Stalin in his long reign of terror. Why? The Soviet Union had turned into a slaughterhouse where brutality had become, quite literally, a virtue.

Lenin, writes Amis, prepared the ground for the greater horror that followed. In the days following the Bolshevik Revolution, Lenin had founded a police state that would only worsen. Terror, Lenin said, was a good thing, a legitimate political tool in the service of "the people." So the foundation was already laid for a nation under Koba the Dread, Stalin, in which "negative perfection" (125) prevailed, the removal of anything good and decent. "A Bolshevik," Khrushchev remarked, "is someone who feels himself to be a Bolshevik even when he's sleeping!" (qtd. in Amis 14) Khrushchev was for once speaking the truth: the inhabitants of the Soviet Union could not sleep in peace, for at night the black cars of the secret service might arrive at any time to arrest anyone, almost at random, and that meant interrogation, torture, and execution. Or, if the prisoner was "lucky," internment in the labour/death camps of the Gulag, which were "just the last and longest stop on an unbelievably terrible road" (60).

Laughter and the Twenty Million: the subtitle of Amis' nightmare-inducing book. Why laughter? *Zachto?* The system was horrifically absurd. "I went into the booth," writes a "voter" in the year 1937, "where supposedly I was going to read the ballot and choose my candidate for the Supreme Soviet…. There was just one name, already marked…. I lifted my collar and ducked down into it so that only my eyes were visible; it was just hilarious" (qtd. in 191). But "laughter" also directs our attention to the fact that Stalin, in comparison with Hitler, is still lightly regarded, and was admired for years by leftists in the West. Amis relates a story about Christopher Hitchens, a leftist fan of the USSR in his earlier days. Before an audience at Conway Hall in London, Hitchens cracked a joke about having spent evenings there with "an old comrade"—meaning, of course, a Soviet sympathizer. Amis, in the audience, himself laughed. *Zachto?* If Hitchens had referred to a Blackshirt, a Nazi, there would have been no laughter. "Why won't laughter do the decent thing? Why won't laughter excuse itself and leave the room?" (257)



Moving Out. Artist: Nicolai Getman. From The Gulag Collection | Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation.
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World War II: even though it was obvious that Hitler's forces were about to invade the USSR in 1941, Stalin was caught completely unprepared. As always, Amis writes, everything Stalin touched was a failure. He had arrested or executed even his generals. Still, Stalin's mind cleared up sufficiently from his psychosis, writes Amis, that, during the "Great Patriotic War," he momentarily paused the terror. And that pause included the churches. "He knew that his citizens would not lay down their lives for socialism. What would they lay their lives down for? Consulting this sudden reality, Stalin saw that religion was still there—that religion, funnily enough, belonged to the real" (186).

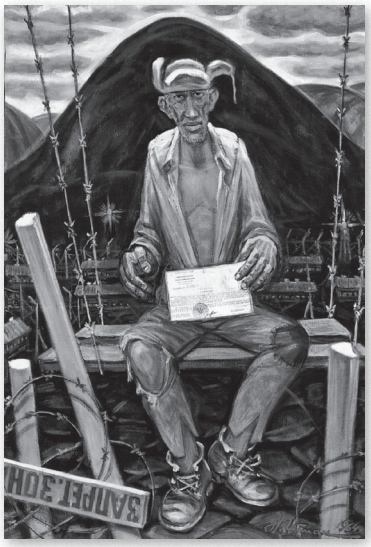
After the war, Stalin was in the habit of repeating, "Ech, together with the Germans we would have been invincible" (qtd. in 193). Was there a "difference," Amis asks, between Hitler and Stalin, Little Moustache and Big Moustache, Satan and Beelzebub? There were no rational reasons for Stalin's terror, argues Amis: he killed because he liked it. And yet in Russia today, under the despotic rule of Vladimir Putin, statues of Stalin are proliferating. Memorials to the victims of the Gulag are being restricted or shut down. Even more astonishing, some of the victims of the Gulag who had previously been "rehabilitated"—declared innocent by post-Soviet governments—have now been de-rehabilitated, declared guilty all over again (Aron).

In 1937 and 1938, what is now known as the Great Terror was unleashed by Stalin. Even his supporters—perhaps especially his supporters—were arrested,

shot, sent to the Gulag. The prisons and camps were crammed with "suspects," and that included Mennonites, who were regarded as particularly dangerous to the State.

The Mennonite Heritage Museum is mounting an exhibit that focuses on Mennonites who were executed or "disappeared." We must not forget. Near the end of *Koba the Dread*, Martin Amis includes the famous poem by Laurence Binyon:

> *They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:*
> *Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.*
> *At the going down of the sun and in the morning*
> *We will remember them….*
>
> *As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,*
> *Moving in marches on the heavenly plain;*
> *As the stars that are starry in our time of darkness,*
> *To the end, to the end, they remain. (270)*



Rehabilitated.
Artist: Nicolai Getman. From The Gulag Collection | Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation.
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CONTROVERSY CONTINUES

Memorial to the Victims of Communism, Ottawa

Reported by Ruth Derksen Siemens

After a delay of more than a year, Canada's Memorial to the Victims of Communism in Ottawa was finally inaugurated on Thursday, December 12, 2024. With only eight days warning, I flew to Ottawa to attend the long-anticipated event. Unfortunately, many people who had donated to commemorate family members did not receive an invitation, causing deep disappointment for donors and chaos for those who tried to register at the Memorial site.

Eventually seated outdoors on metal chairs at 9:00 am at a frosty -10° Celsius, the audience was surprisingly responsive. Significant speeches were presented by a First Nations elder holding smouldering sweetgrass, members of Tribute to Liberty, a member of the House of Commons, survivors, and veterans. Occasional voices of protesters were heard outside of the fenced area, but were generally contained.

The Memorial itself, the *Arc of Memory*, stood starkly on a concrete plaza against a backdrop of winter trees and cityscape. According to architect Paul Raff and team, the walls support more than 4000 short bronze rods arranged densely along 365 steel fins; each pointing to a unique angle of the sun—one for every hour of every day across the year. Divided down the centre to correspond with the darkest day of the year, the Memorial commemorates winter solstice, thereby inviting visitors to step into a symbolic journey from the darkness of oppression to the light of freedom.

But unfortunately, the controversy that has followed the project over the past decade continues. In 2021, it was revealed that private donations to the project had been made in honour of known Fascists and Nazi collaborators.

Since then, Canadian Heritage has been vetting the names that will eventually be added to the Memorial, but it's a complicated process. Some of those whose names were commemorated had come from parts of Europe that were occupied by *both* Soviets and Nazis during World War II. Some had also been displaced by the preceding civil war. Many questions emerge about the process of assessing and documenting individuals' participation during the chaos: Who is personally responsible? Who can be blamed? Which activities are controversial? Which ones are merely survival tactics? What criteria are used to define a Nazi collaborator?

Who has the power to define these roles? Who is powerless in the process?

To complicate matters further, several weeks before the initial inauguration was scheduled (November 2, 2023) the scandal of Yaroslav Hunka as a guest in Canada's House of Commons triggered further concerns that other Nazi collaborators' names had possibly been posted on the Wall of Remembrance.

Swift action was needed. Of the total of 553 names posted, 330 were initially removed. Eventually, all names were removed from the Wall of Remembrance. Now the scrutiny continues as the Department of Canadian Heritage reviews all names submitted in order to avoid commemorating individuals or events linked to Nazi activities. To date, the department has already determined that 50 to 60 of the names or organizations that were to be placed on the Memorial were likely associated with Nazi activity.

A statement on the Canadian Government's website explains that "the Government of Canada is doing its due diligence to ensure all aspects of the Memorial remain compatible with Canadian values on democracy and human rights." As to the future, the official position is that approved names will be posted on the Memorial at some time in 2025.

Artist's rendition of Memorial to Victims of Communism in Ottawa.
Image source: *Memorial to the Victims of Communism* Newsletter.

Overall, despite the complex scrutiny and ongoing controversy, for those whose friends and family members had been killed or who had fled persecution under communist regimes, the focus was on honouring and remembering the victims. Despite the blank spaces on the Wall of Remembrance and the void of the missing names, the Memorial is an inspiration—inviting us to reflect not only on our heritage, but also on Canada as a free and welcoming country.

For more information, see the following:

CBC—"Memorial to Victims of Communism finally unveiled, but controversy lingers." https://www.cbc.ca/amp/1.7408988

Ottawa Citizen—https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/memorial-to-victims-of-communism-monument-unveiled-ottawa

GENEALOGY: THE TIES THAT BIND

Canadian Author Digs Up Mennonite Roots

By Gladys Loewen with George Bowering
(All photos courtesy of the authors)

George Bowering's journey into his possible Mennonite ancestry started one afternoon when the residents of our floor met over coffee and tea to get to know our new neighbours from Turkey. Didem (Arda) brought Turkish coffee, Jean (George) brought tea, and I (Mel) brought sour cherry *platz.* Didem and Arda were excited to know that sour cherries grow in Canada and were curious about Mennonites when I explained that my Mennonite grandmothers had sour cherry trees and used the fruit to bake *platz* and *pirohki*. To my surprise, George mentioned that he had Mennonite ancestors, but knew little about them.

Out of curiosity, George searched his records and provided me with the name of his maternal

Amos and Maryann Brubaker, Oregon.

Great-grandmother Mary Ann Dettweiler who married a Brubaker. His initial interest included the origin of their migration to North America, the pertinent date,

and confirmation that they were Mennonites. After some sleuthing on the internet, I discovered that Mary Ann Dettweiler (1861-1931) from Michigan married Amos Brubaker (1862-1939) from Ontario who happened to be working in Michigan for a few years. They moved to Red Deer, Northwest Territory (now Alberta) and, in their later years, to McMinnville, Oregon, where they are buried.

Delving into the Dettweiler history, we discovered that Mary Ann's third Great-grandfather Rudolph (1733-1787) and his father, Melchior Dettweiler (1699-1791), fled from Switzerland to the French area of the Palatinate to escape religious persecution. Records suggest that Amish leaders in Amsterdam requested that Melchior travel to North America to determine if Pennsylvania was friendly and suitable for displaced Amish people. He and his son travelled to Amsterdam and boarded a ship to Philadelphia, arriving in 1736. In 1810, Rudolph's son, Rudolph III, moved from Pennsylvania to Upper Canada, which explains the Canadian ancestry.

Digging into the Brubacher history, the fourth great-grandfather of Mary Ann's husband Amos, Reverend Abraham Herr Brubacher (1731-1811), and his father, Abraham Meyer Brubacher (1695-1753), were originally from Switzerland but were pressured to leave since Anabaptists were no longer welcome there. They arrived in Pennsylvania, United Colonies, between 1749 and 1751 from the Palatinate. Reverend Brubacher's gravestone mentions 1750; however, Canadian and American websites differ on their arrival date. Shortly after arrival, he purchased land on the Nanticoke settlement area (occupied by the Nanticoke via permission of the Iroquois Confederacy) and built farm structures as well as a school that doubled as an Old Order Mennonite Church. He reserved a plot for a family cemetery that became known as the Brubacher (Brubaker) Cemetery in Lancaster Township, PA. Some Brubacher descendants stayed in the USA, others moved to Canada, while a few moved back and forth between the two countries.

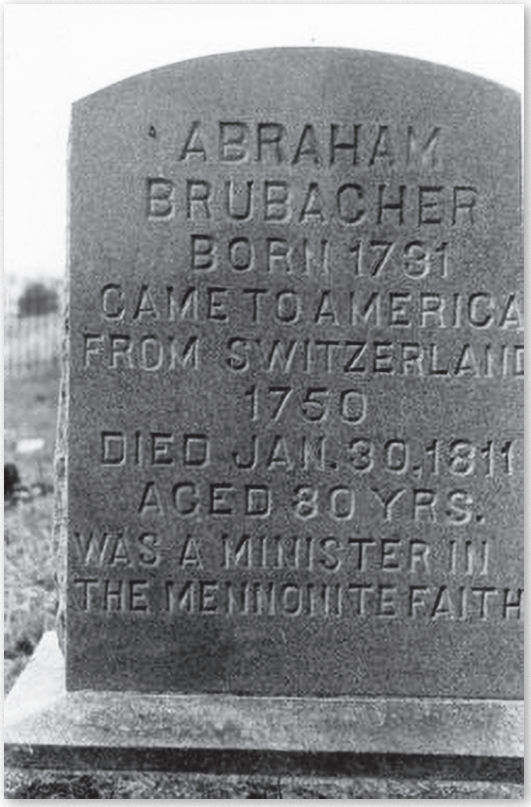
Johannes Sherk Brubacher (known as Cooper John, 1807-1887), Amos' grandfather, appears, in 1828, to have been the first Brubacher to move to Upper Canada, where he met Elizabeth Burkhart (1808-1881) who became his wife. Her father moved the family from Pennsylvania to Upper Canada when she was young. Both are buried in St. Jacobs Cemetery, Waterloo County, Ontario. Elizabeth Burkhart's Great-grandfather Jacob Burckhart (original spelling) (1747-1821) left Berne, Switzerland, to travel to the United Colonies with his father sometime prior to 1769, as records indicate he married Barbara Hershey in 1769 in Lancaster County, PA, and, in 1772, they purchased a farm.

This evidence appears to substantiate that the genealogical roots of a major Canadian literary figure, George Bowering, a two-time winner of the Governor General's Award, the first Parliamentary Poet Laureate of Canada, and an Officer of the Order of Canada as well as Order of British Columbia, derive from Swiss Mennonite and Amish ancestry. George was fascinated to discover the location in Europe where his ancestors had lived, their reason for emigrating, and their Mennonite denomination, which led to more questions. We looked into Worms, Palatinate, since most families emigrated from that area. The religious persecution they experienced was upsetting. After reading about Old Order Mennonite and Amish culture and beliefs, he was surprised that his ancestors were from conservative Mennonite sects. George shook his head, saying, "I would never have survived in that conservative environment. Where are the artists, authors, the literary people in my ancestry?"

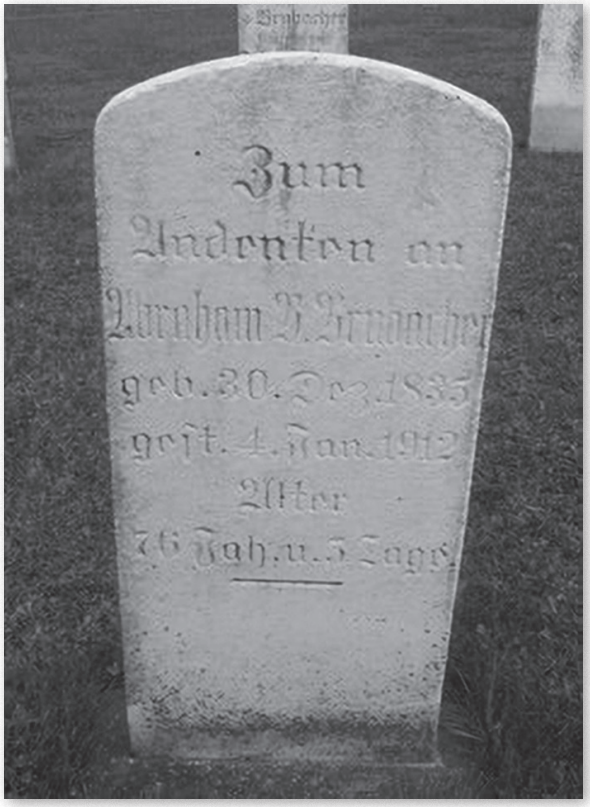
Our exploration into the Dettweiler, Brubaker and Burkhart history revealed names including Brandt, Eshleman, Meyer and Eby. George wondered if he might be distantly related to author Di Brandt, poet Clayton Eshleman or Premier David Eby. He relished the idea of a chocolate inheritance waiting for him when he realized his fifth Great-grandfather Jacob Burckhart married Maria Hershey from Lancaster where the Hershey chocolate empire started. Milton, who founded the chocolate company, and Maria are descendants of Christian Hershey. This bubble burst quickly when we discovered that Milton and Maria Hershey had no heirs. With a heightened desire for chocolate, George announced he is willing to receive chocolates from any Mennonite source.

It was a disappointment when our genealogical research did not come up with names like Wiebe, Schroeder, or Toews, since he knows Rudy and Andreas and is familiar with Miriam. George chuckled, recalling the time he informed Rudy Wiebe that his grandmother was a Mennonite. Rudy exclaimed, "Well, now my estimation of you has gone up 25%!" He has communicated

various times with poet Patrick Friesen whom George describes as a "Mennno-not," since some of his poetry explores the shunning and ostracism Pat experienced for questioning the demands of his Mennonite faith. George is currently corresponding with a former high school classmate, Val Friesen, who is well known for his work with First Nations communities.



Rev. Abraham Brubacher 1731–1811 gravestone.



Abraham B Brubacher gravestone.

The ties to his Mennonite heritage ended with his Grandmother Maple Brubaker Brinson, who died before her daughter Pearl Brinson's first birthday. Maple had married Emmitt Brinson, a non-Mennonite, who after her death married a non-Mennonite woman with children. Thus information about family roots and Mennonite religion was not passed on to Pearl, George's mother, leaving him with no knowledge of his Mennonite background. In fact, Pearl disclosed to George that she did not even know where her mother Maple was buried, which prompted George to investigate Mary Ann's and Maple's history and gravesites.

Ministerial service seems to flow through George's family roots. There are two Reverends in the Brubacher lineage, two deacons in the Burkhart family and his Grandfather Bowering was a Baptist minister. As there was no Baptist Church in Oliver where George grew up, he attended Sunday school at the United Church. He observed that Anabaptists and Baptists share the belief that baptism is a mature decision, not a ritual at birth. While George has inherited some Baptist values from his Bowering grandfather, he describes himself as a "Baptist Atheist." His current values include equality for all, including women and gays, and the importance of inspiration through art and literature.

George observed that both our family histories include displaced people, viewed as "the Anabaptist problem" (Haston), who came to North America for religious freedom during different decades and from different denominations of Mennonites. He is waiting to find out if this genealogical information will change him. At this point, George is not claiming to be a Mennonite, as he was not raised in this faith or culture. Maybe the fact that he started playing the Mennonite game, wondering if he were related to Di Brandt, is proof enough for some of us to say, "He is one of us."

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EXCERPT (SECTION 1) POEM SERIES BY GEORGE BOWERING

"Do Sink"

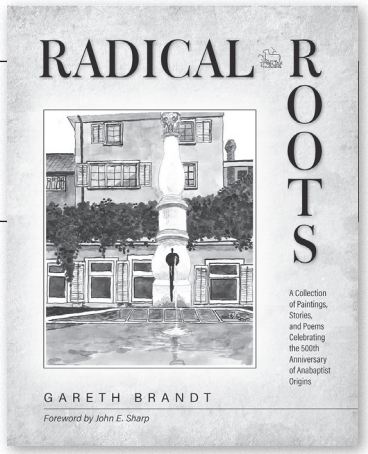
When I have fears that I
may cease to be
open to pain that shines
wet on the side of a gold
fish in my own, I thought,
pond

I ought to forget
comfort, forget family
history, drive a black sedan
over thin prairie roads
looking for a town even
my mother does not believe
was ever there

knowing
pain is not colour, not value
but condition, the cost
of starting a damned life
in the first place, where no
thinking man ever was

BOOK REVIEWS

Gareth Brandt. *Radical Roots: A Collection of Paintings, Stories, and Poems Celebrating the 500th Anniversary of Anabaptist Origins*. Morgantown, PA: Masthof Press, 2024. 83 pp.



Reviewed by Robert Martens

"Anabaptism": for many of us, the word suggests martyrdom. And in *Radical Roots*, Gareth Brandt's sketch of the Anabaptist story, the deaths of "rebaptizers" at the hands of their sixteenth-century oppressors do play a pivotal role. After all, the introduction to the book is written, significantly, by John Sharp whose son Michael was martyred in 2017 in the Democratic Republic of Congo while advocating for peace. But of course, Anabaptism has far wider implications. In response to his question, "why does Anabaptism still matter?" Brandt contends that the Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage bears the significant and admirable markers of peace, separation from the state, simplicity, community, and *doing* rather than just *believing*.


Gareth Brandt.
Photo source: Gareth Brandt.

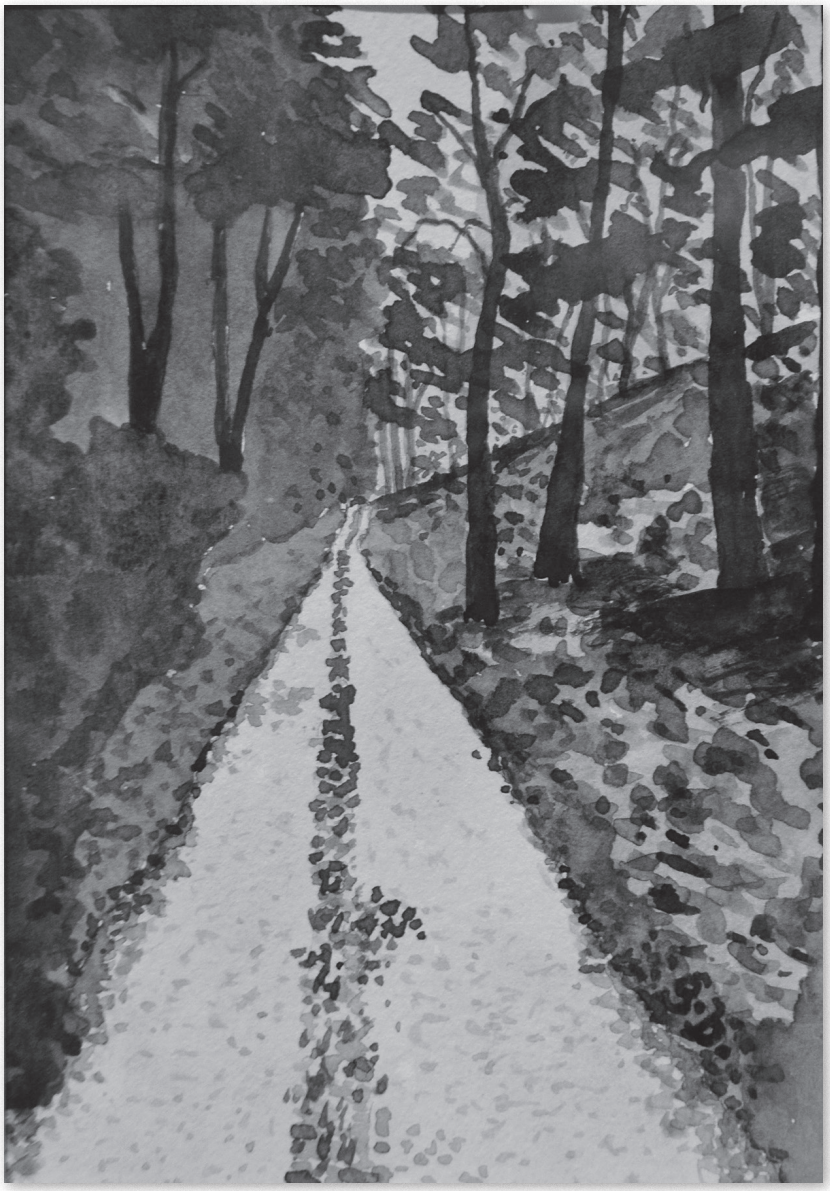
"Radical": another word that can be variously defined. Today, we tend to think of radical extremists who deal in violence. Brandt points out that the word "radical" derives from the Latin, "*radix*," meaning "root"—Anabaptists meant to go back to "the roots of Christianity." Another definition, he writes, is to be "marked by a considerable departure from the usual or traditional," (2) and Brandt emphasizes this usage. An

apt definition of the mindset of our Anabaptist forebears—although some Anabaptists, as in the violent uprising at Münster, were definitely radical in the extremist sense.

Most early Anabaptists were committed to nonviolence. How could a single religious movement, though, vary so widely, asks Brandt. Its origins are "a moving target," with Anabaptist views fluctuating with geography, ethnicity, personality, and so on. "Those varied and messy origins might even be part of its appeal and ongoing significance!" (1)

Gareth Brandt's book is an accessible mix of artwork (his own), poetry (mostly his own) and stories. In line with the Anabaptist ideal of simplicity, the paintings are in a "simple folk-art style" and the frames, backing and mattes were purchased from an MCC thrift store or were handmade. The poetry is colloquial and frequently funny: for example, "five hundred years we're still alive; / we do not look like we did then: / split once, split twice, split thrice, times ten. / Will we true love and learn to thrive?" (22) And Brandt's stories are both historical and personal; a particularly compelling tale describes his hike in Emmental, Switzerland, to a cave where Anabaptists once gathered to worship.

All that said, Brandt's *Radical Roots* is a kind of miniature, soft-cover coffee table book, easy to page through and yet suffused with insight. Despite accounts of torture and execution, it is something of a breezy read. Trust the author to crack a joke when the going is toughest.



Road to Schleitheim. Watercolour by Gareth Brandt.

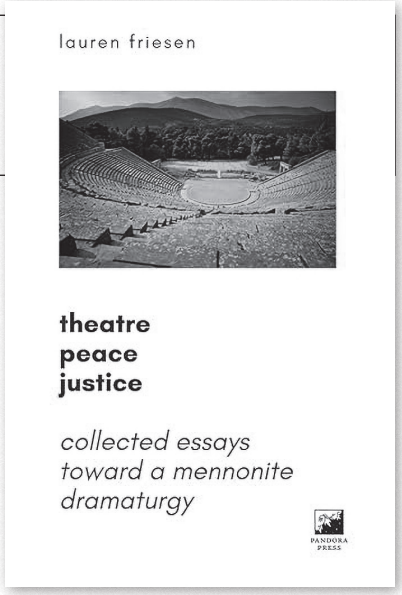
Brandt covers a lot of ground. For example:

- His painting of a stunningly beautiful cathedral, but what would he have felt, asks Brandt, if he were a poor peasant, "knowing that my tax and tithe money had built this impressive structure while my family at home were starving" (5).
- "The school of heretics," Manz, Blaurock and Grebel, young and rebellious. Brandt had grown up "thinking that Mennonites were a bunch of old, out-of-touch traditionalists…" (13).
- Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms, opening up "a can of worms."
- The "third baptism" of Felix Manz, a term of mockery used by his persecutors for his execution by drowning in the Limmat River.
- The leadership of Helena von Freyburg. Anabaptists challenged their contemporaries by calling women "sisters," equal before God. Yet prominent female leaders of the time have often been forgotten.
- The Hutterite movement. "Love is like fire," wrote Peter Riedemann, a Hutterite pastor.
- The monumentally slow departure of Menno Simons from the Catholic Church. Was this perhaps due, asks Brandt, to the example of the brilliant scholar Erasmus, who fiercely criticized the Church but would not leave?

Near the end of his book is a brief sermon by Brandt, "Roll Over Menno." The diverse beginnings of

Anabaptism, he writes, developed into a movement that—no surprise—is seemingly perpetually splitting: "Menno might be rolling over in his grave with anguish and disappointment…" (62). Still, Mennonites of many different kinds have stressed that there is no foundation other than Christ. Faith in action. Community. Peace. "Roll over Menno. Do you dig this? … We are not in competition between evangelicals, progressives, charismatics/contemplatives, and conservatives. We're on the same team" (65).

Lauren Friesen. *Theatre Peace Justice: Collected Essays Toward a Mennonite Dramaturgy*. Thunder Bay, ON: Pandora Press, 2024. 275 pp.



■ **Reviewed by Richard Toews**

It has been a great honour and privilege for me to read and review Lauren Friesen's latest book, *Theatre Peace Justice: Collected Essays Toward a Mennonite Dramaturgy.* It is not my intention to provide a scintillating summary. My thoughts are to place Friesen's work within a larger body of work by scholars such as Bertolt Brecht, René Girard, Mikhail Bakhtin and Victor Turner.

Theatre Peace Justice is divided into three sections. The first two chapters provide the reader with an overall theoretical framework that explores the linkage between drama and a religious existentialist condition. Simply put, Friesen points out that theatre is about two distinct realities merging into one but at the service of the reality of the empirical. In the second section, chapters three to five, Friesen examines the role drama has played within the context of the Mennonite community. In contradistinction to music, the Mennonite community by and large has devoted little time to the dramatic arts as a fitting artistic expression of their faith, which is not to say that Mennonites have not played an important role in the world of the theatre. Section three, chapters six to eight, is devoted to Friesen's profound understanding of theatre as an agent for justice. Here, Friesen explores justice as expressed artistically in the form of a sharp critical rebuke of power structures in the shape of a Brechtian satire.

There is a deep well from which to draw upon in Friesen's work, but as with authors, reviewers are also restricted to length. With that in mind, I shall examine *Theatre Peace Justice* within the framework of three key areas: theatre as a transcendent mode; theatre as a mediator of justice; and theatre as a vehicle of the comedic. It is important to note here that as such, the comedic device is in keeping with Brechtian satire which envelops a narrative voice speaking up for the cause of justice. I would argue that Friesen's work reveals that all three subjects have a common theme; that is, theatre is as Victor Turner notes in his seminal article, "Social Dramas and Stories about Them," a social drama transformed into a stage drama that articulates the community's shared values and strategies to maintain a just and civil society.

"The Mennonite community has long been recognized for its superb rendition of the musical masterpieces of Bach, Handel, Brahms, and Mendelssohn oratorios."

It is highly noteworthy that Friesen's scholarship extends beyond a confined artistic Mennonite context, yet it exists within that context. The Mennonite community has long been recognized for its superb rendition of the musical masterpieces of Bach, Handel, Brahms, and Mendelssohn oratorios. But as Friesen notes, "Ethnic theatre has flourished because it provides a community with internal cohesion and external identity. Inside this context, theatre … serves as a vehicle for memory and expression while enabling those beyond the 'pale' to gain knowledge of ethnic life and tradition" (53). Within the ethnic world of the Mennonites, theatre has thrived

in the shadow of their musical brilliance. Theatre as a Mennonite artistic expression, Friesen contends, deserves recognition, front and centre. There is, Friesen writes, the contemporary work of John Friesen, an actor and playwright from Winkler, Manitoba, who holds sixty acting credits; his play, *Benched*, a parallel to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, is set to go before the cameras in September 2024. Apart from Friesen (John), Friesen (Lauren) notes that drama has been very much a part of the Anabaptist tradition. Mennonite dramatic writing flourished during the Dutch Golden Age (1600-1700). Mennonite playwright Joost van den Vondel was called "Holland's Shakespeare" due to the elegant nature of his writing. Vondel's work, as Friesen notes, had a profound influence on John Milton who "borrowed heavily from this work for his epic poem, *Paradise Lost."* Ben Jonson as well as Voltaire referenced Anabaptists in their work: Jonson in *The Alchemist*, Voltaire in *Candide*. Aside from the writers just mentioned, Friesen points us to the importance of one Hermann Sudermann (1857-1928). The importance of his place in the world of theatre cannot be understated. Emma Goldman said of Suderman that he was "the first German dramatist to treat social topics and discuss the pressing questions of the day" (qtd. in Friesen 11). His play *Heimat* and others had long performances in Berlin, London, Vienna and New York. He was, Friesen notes, heralded as the new Ibsen. After seeing a production of Sudermann's *Heimat*, which opened with Sarah Bernhardt, George Bernard Shaw had this to say: "There really was something to roar about this time" (qtd. in 127).

To be sure, many of the dominant themes in Anabaptist/Mennonite theatre are religious in nature, i.e., the human connection and relationship to God. Friesen refers to this mode of expression as transcendent. There is, however, Friesen notes, a tendency in modernist theatre of an overt falling away from this form of transcendence, and yet Friesen is quick to note that "the arts have the potential to contribute to religion because they explore the expression of feeling, imaginative process, sensual awareness and the distinction between surface and depth perception. When art functions in this manner it contributes to religious understanding because it participates in the journey toward fulfilment and hope" (188). What is Friesen talking about here? One cannot help but make the connection between Friesen's understanding and René Girard's idea of a horizontal transcendence where the Brechtian idea of epic theatre, his fourth wall, completes the action in which alienation plays a dominant role. The audience, much like in Friesen's argument above, identifies with the hero, specifically with the hero's resentment, setting up the occasion for Nietzschean alienation. The experience of vicarious suffering through identification with a tragic hero (see Friesen, p. 187) is the meaning of catharsis as defined by Aristotle, which Brecht identifies as empathy:

> The spectator comes away purged of worldly resentment. In real life, we may resent the hero but in stage drama, we are able to put aside our resentment because of the hero's formal otherness. This is what allows the audience to identify with heroes, kings and tyrants and such. In the world of theatre, we can imagine ourselves in the sacred place at the centre of public attention, which is the locus of desire. Beyond mere escapism, dramatic catharsis reorients the emotional life of the beneficiary and temporarily lessens the need for vengeance in the real world. The solidarity that is felt among the audience is a consolation for resentment. The relief is real though short-lived; it is what we feel when leaving a great performance en masse. (Ernest Ewert, "Reflections on Resentment," unpublished essay, 2021)

Theatre, as Friesen understands it, is about the Girardian horizontal transcendence or deviated transcendence; in the case of theatre, the dramatic event removes the violence inherent in the ontological madness that is Girard's mimetic desire. Aristotle's notion of empathy is, through the Brechtian approach, transformed by catharsis.

Let me say a few words about Friesen's treatment of theatre as concerns the comedic. In Friesen's discussion of Swiss dramatist and essayist Friedrich Dürrenmatt, he records that Dürrenmatt takes the story of the Münster rebellion and transforms it into an Anabaptist play of the darkest satire. Friesen notes that the script, a grotesque comedy (a "black comedy") character type, pulls out all the stops of the grotesque which translates into an attack on injustice. For a time, the play *Es steht geschrieben* languished, but then, as Friesen notes, the student rebellions that swept across Western Europe in the sixties revitalized Dürrenmatt's vision. Rewritten, the play becomes *Die Wiedertäufer* (The Anabaptists). Dürrenmatt's hero (of sorts) is a failed tailor who becomes a failed actor denied admission into the profession. In the original, the

hero has fallen into a drunken sleep in a manure wagon, and when arrested for vagrancy, he builds his defence around the supernatural, claiming an angel picked him up in Leiden and flew him to Münster to rescue the city. In the rewrite, the failed actor becomes a noted orator and leader. The allusion is clear and obvious. The failed painter is Hitler, and Münster is the Germany of Adolf Hitler. One certainly cannot miss what Friesen is alluding to; here the parallel to Bakhtin's Menippean satire is clear. "The abstract idea," Bakhtin argues in his *Rabelais and His World*, "distorts this nature of the grotesque image. It transforms the center of gravity into a 'moral' meaning. Moreover, it submits the substratum of the image to the negative element. Exaggeration becomes a caricature. The beginning of this process is found even in early Protestant Satire, and later in the previously mentioned 'Menippus Satire'" (*Rabelais and His World*, tr. Hélène Iswolsky, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 62).

Theatre Peace Justice is a serious work of profound scholarship. It deserves to be front and centre and required reading in university drama departments, and in particular in Mennonite colleges and universities that have come to an understanding that there is a sacred quality to drama. Drama in the context of faith and the Christian religion in particular, has always been linked to the sacred. It isn't without cause that Catholics regard the celebration of the Mass and Eucharist as sacred drama. For this reason, Friesen's book deserves a deep reading. Indeed, as Friesen points out, the reasoning behind his scholarship is to reveal that works "which are not religious in an obvious way" do indeed "portray the human condition and express something of the divine presence in the human condition" (p. 187).

Richard Toews holds a PhD from Simon Fraser University in interdisciplinary studies, the focus of which is Anthropology, History, Religion and Literary Criticism. Subsequent to the completion of his studies, Toews taught at SFU's First Nations Institute for fifteen years, till his retirement. Toews has published two novels of historical fiction, *The Quiet in the Land* and *The Confession*. Additionally, Toews has written, directed and produced the short film, *The Prodigal* (based on the parable, "The Prodigal Son"), which went on to win a Gold Remi award at the Houston International Film Festival in 2015. Toews also holds the distinction of being an Irish whiskey connoisseur and cigar aficionado.

It Is Written: Friedrich Dürrenmatt and the Uprising in Münster

■ **By Robert Martens (all translations by the author)**

In 1534, radical Anabaptists seized the town of Münster in Westfalen and declared it the new Jerusalem. The powers of Europe reacted swiftly. Lutheran and Catholic armies besieged the city. Soon the inhabitants were on the verge of starvation. By June 1535, the city had fallen. Its Anabaptist leaders were tortured and their bodies placed in cages which were hung for the edification of the masses from the steeple of St. Lambert's Church. The cages remain there to this day.

The events at Münster traumatized Europe much like the 9/11 attacks shocked the Western world in 2001. Anabaptists such as Menno Simons who preached non-violence nonetheless were forced to defend themselves as distinctly different from the Münsterites. Thousands were executed despite their peaceful lives, and it would be years before Anabaptist-Mennonites received some degree of acceptance in the broader European community. And in the following centuries, the trauma of Münster resurfaced in literature and the arts. For example:

Friedrich Dürrenmatt. Photo source: *Frankfurter Rundschau*. httpswww.fr.dekulturliteraturder-spurt-zu-sich-

- in *The Unfortunate Traveller*, a 1594 novella by Thomas Nashe (see *Roots and Branches* April 2009).
- in Jonathan Swift's satirical masterwork, *A Tale*

of a Tub, in the late 1690s, in which a character named Jack is a stand-in for both John Calvin and Jan van Leyden, a Münsterite leader.

- the 1849 opera, *Le prophète* (The Prophet), by Giacomo Meyerbeer.
- a play, *In Nomine Dei* (In the Name of God), by Nobel-winning writer José Saramago.
- a 1993 German television series, *König der letzten Tage* (King of the Last Days), starring Oscar-winning Austrian actor Christoph Waltz.
- and perhaps most notably in a tragicomedy, *Es steht geschrieben* (It Is Written), penned by Swiss playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt and first staged in 1947 in the *Schauspielhaus* in Zürich.

Friedrich was born in 1921 to Reinhold—a Protestant pastor—and Hulda Dürrenmatt. Friedrich was apparently not an especially good student. During the Second World War, he became a dedicated young fascist but later claimed he had done so to demarcate himself from his father. Nevertheless, his later writings were imbued with religious themes of guilt and responsibility. Dürrenmatt studied at universities in Bern and Zürich, blossomed as a visual artist and thinker, and intended to write a thesis on Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. The thesis was never finished, however; he quit school in 1946, determined to make a living as a writer.

Dürrenmatt's very first play was *Es steht geschrieben*, based upon the events of the Münster rebellion. It was not an auspicious beginning. The wild, madcap tragicomedy incited audience members to walk out, and in some cases to engage in fisticuffs. Dürrenmatt turned to crime fiction to earn some money. Eventually, he achieved success on the stage, though, especially with his play, *Die Physiker* (The Physicists), a brilliant treatment of the abdication of social responsibility by contemporary scientists. It was widely translated and performed internationally. Dürrenmatt won several awards for his writing. His fame was such that, late in life, he interviewed Mikhail Gorbachev and Václav Havel. He died of a heart attack in 1990. Dürrenmatt had married twice (his first wife died), both times to actresses.

Es steht geschrieben, is overwrought, clunky, and far too long, yet contains moments of sheer brilliance. An accurate recounting of events in Münster is not the goal. In his brief foreword, Dürrenmatt writes, "Perhaps it should be mentioned that it was not my intention to write a history, since I have not examined the documentation, and have read few books on what occurred in the city" (Dürrenmatt 11). The play opens with a ragged and fanatical group of Anabaptists speaking directly to the audience; in his stage directions, Dürrenmatt mentions that they might smell of onion. No wonder that audience members walked out. The dialogues and lengthy monologues are brilliant but challenging, often stuffed with apocalyptic imagery. In the first dramatic scene (that is, after the lengthy monologues of the Anabaptists are done), rebel leader Johann Bockelson wakes up, clearly hungover, in a manure wagon, claiming to bystanders that he has been miraculously transported by an angel from his Dutch home. The harsh, searing, yet often funny language continues throughout. At one point, another rebel leader, Jan Matthisson, accuses Dürrenmatt himself of being a fallen-away secularist, "an uprooted Protestant, tainted with lumps of doubt, suspicious of faith, which he admires because he has lost it..." (Dürrenmatt 58).

To describe the plot of the play might be a quixotic endeavour. Is there a plot? The tragicomedy consists of a series of sketches in which everyone, Anabaptist, Lutheran, and Catholic, are all complicit in power and abuse. Clearly, this will not end well. Only the Catholic bishop seems to have some grasp of reality. "Perhaps," he says to Anabaptist rebel Bernhard Knipperdollinck, "God won't help any side in this war" (Dürrenmatt 41). In the final scenes, Knipperdollinck has the last word, stripping himself of his wealth, wandering the streets of the city, and emptying himself of worldly desires; yet in the end he feels only despair.

This play, written by a young genius, was nevertheless a first work that would need revision. And revision occurred in 1967, when *Es steht geschrieben* was revised, shortened, and retitled *Die Wiedertäufer*. Mennonite scholar Lauren Friesen, who translated the work as *The Anabaptists*—the manuscript has not been published—claims that this second version of Dürrenmatt's play is more historically accurate, and much more political in content: Dürrenmatt had been a member of the *Gruppe Olten*, a leftist writers group that met at a restaurant in Olten, Switzerland, and politics was in his bones. The second version of the play is less religious in intent. But more historical? Questionable, since in *Die Wiedertäufer*, Anabaptist rebel Johann Bockelson escapes the siege

of his city and is lauded by his former enemies for his authoritarian rule.

Certainly, a reference to Hitler. Perhaps, as well, Dürrenmatt is expressing his regrets, his guilt, for participating in the National Socialist Party as a young man. He was a man of conscience, a non-ideologue, who attempted in his plays to awaken a social conscience and an activist response. In the modern world, Dürrenmatt wrote, guilt and responsibility are disregarded as irrelevant, and this results in catastrophes such as World War II. And perhaps not only in the modern world. Dürrenmatt writes, somewhat ambiguously, in stage directions to *Es steht geschriben*, that he is attempting to portray onstage "a multi-coloured world that existed yesterday exactly as today and tomorrow" (Dürrenmatt 13).

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BOOK PRESENTATION, OCTOBER 5, 2024

Hildi Froese Tiessen. *On Mennonite/s Writing; selected essays.* Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2023. 318 pp.

Reported by Robert Martens

Hildi Froese Tiessen introducing her book *On Mennonite/s Writing; selected essays.*
Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.

Fifty years of studying Mennonite writing: this is the remarkable resumé of Hildi Froese Tiessen, professor emerita at Conrad Grebel College. Tiessen has gathered her essays on Mennonite authorship and consolidated them in her new book, *On Mennonite/s Writing*. On October 5, at the Mennonite Heritage Museum, she delivered a sharply organized lecture on the flowering and evolution of Mennonite literature, focusing on Canadian writers, but some American as well.

Rudy Wiebe's novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, said Tiessen, marked a breakthrough in Mennonite writing, but earlier on, brilliant writers such as Arnold Dyck were writing in German. Mennonite authorship emerged from ethnic enclaves, she pointed out; Mennonites and Jews were originally among the rare non-Anglo voices on the Canadian literary scene. Soon, though, writers such as Di Brandt, Patrick Friesen, and Sandra Birdsell were addressing a much larger audience. Today, the Mennonite community includes authors such as Miriam Toews, a bestselling novelist whose work has been produced on film. The original "breakthrough group" of the 1980s are still writing, but their subject matter, and their readership, have been significantly transformed.

So what exactly is "Mennonite writing?" Tiessen asked. Where do they "locate?" Are they ethnic or religious? "I find it useful to define it as both," said Tiessen. Earlier Mennonite writers in Canada were frequently accused of being "unbelievers"—the Mennonite community harboured strong suspicions about arts such as writing. Even today, Mennonite authors might be described as "exiles" from their community. Mennonite writing, though, provides a sanctuary of sorts for their authors, Tiessen argued. "Mennonite literature is a kind of homeland."

Leonard Friesen, lectures, 7 pm, October 25 and 2 pm, October 26, 2024

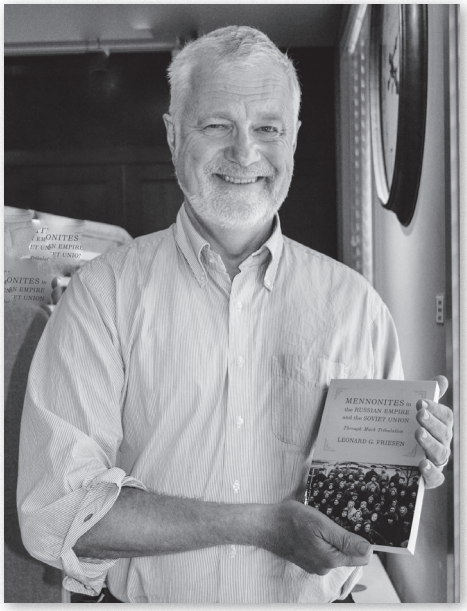
Reported by Robert Martens

Mennonite Settlement of Chortitza and Molotschna in the Russian Empire, 1789-1848

Leonard Friesen, professor of history at Wilfrid Laurier University, began his lectures with an introduction: his mother was a D.P., or displaced person, who regarded that designation with pride; his father was

from Schoenfeld; his family never talked about the past. Friesen made up for the lack of family stories by making over thirty trips to Ukraine and/or Russia, and by living in the Soviet Union from 1987 to 1988 during the Gorbachev era. He is fluent in German and Russian.

Friesen might be described as a "contrarian," or, more fairly, as a historian who loves to deflate stereotypes and misconceptions. He commented that "we approach Mennonite history as though it existed in a vacuum," but "Mennonites didn't live in the bubble we put them in." We tend to impose our own biases—Mennonites, he said, were in fact very much part of the Russian Empire. Russians and Mennonites were *not* fundamentally separate.



Leonard Friesen with his book *Mennonite Settlement of Chortitza and Molotschna in the Russian Empire, 1789-1848.* Photo source: Julia M. Toews.

When European Mennonites, at the invitation of Catherine the Great, immigrated to Russia, there was as yet no Ukraine, said Friesen. That designation didn't exist until the time of Stalin. The enormous land in which the first Mennonites settled included estates and large peasant properties but was considered to be underdeveloped, and grants were given to Europeans, Jews, Tatars, and Russians to settle there and develop it. Mennonites, said Friesen, were a part of a throng of immigrants, and were *not* crowding out native peoples.

Were the Mennonites granted excessive privileges that ensured their success? The *Privilegium* that negotiated their rights, licences, and concessions was absolutely necessary, said Friesen, since otherwise they would have had no rights at all. The Russian state made numerous deals with incoming settlers. Mennonites were *not* unique.

Did Mennonites have the "Midas touch" in farming, as many seem to believe? The beginnings in Chortitza, settled in 1789, were extremely difficult. Many of the Mennonites in this first influx into Russia were merchants, not farmers, and a steep learning curve followed. In fact, at this point they were still speaking Dutch, and would have preferred settlement close to large cities to benefit their economy and trade. The development into prosperous villages did *not* happen overnight.

Did Mennonites and their neighbours have an abrasive relationship? In fact, said Friesen, Mennonites were never isolated, and did *not* regard other ethnic groups and classes as hostile. Relationships were good from the start, and in fact this was just good business sense. Friesen argued that "empires allow for a certain flexibility" that nation-states do not. Many areas of the Russian Empire were in constant flux, and neighbours negotiated with neighbours.

Did the use of the German language alienate the settlers in Chortitza and Molotschna from others living in the Russian Empire? No, said Friesen: German was not uncommonly spoken among the aristocracy, and Catherine the Great herself was born and raised in Prussia. Friesen went on to argue that Russia was in fact "undergoverned": the bureaucracy was too small (this might come as a shock to North Americans, he said), and so control was farmed out to the various regions, including the German-speaking ones. The German tongue was *not* a handicap.

Finally, "did they get what they deserved" after 1917? Historians now mostly agree, Friesen said, that the Revolution was not inevitable. There was *not* an inescapable historical trajectory.

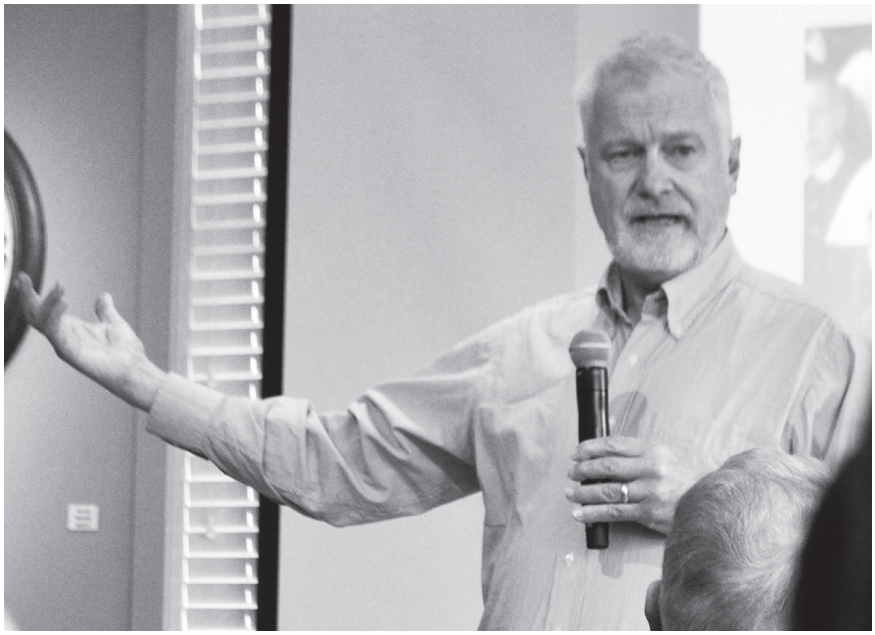
Soviet Mennonites after Stalin: From Khrushchev to Gorbachev, 1953-1991

The second lecture was likewise focused on North American biases and stereotypes. We are often uncomfortable with paradox, Friesen argued. Although Mennonites experienced horrors under Stalin, they nevertheless identified as "Soviet Mennonites." Even today, German Mennonites frequently side with Russia.

The USSR was so chaotic and inefficient, Friesen contended, it could not even be described as a "police state." It was, however, a place of terror and death for many. Leonard Friesen's mother's family, he said, was wiped out. Yet, "we must move beyond the caricature." Some Mennonites even found happiness in the USSR, though

that may have been rare. And Mennonites refused to concede: "They were victims, but not victims"—"they had a boldness that puts North American Mennonites to shame."

When their men were sent to labour camps, women and the elderly took over. They reclaimed their faith, Friesen said, and developed a "post-Gulag theology." Today in the West, Friesen contended, we have invested in cartoon figures—victimizers on one side, the victimized on the other. Mennonites, however, had "agency"; they fought back with the "weapons of the powerless"; they endured, as did Black slaves in Antebellum America, said Friesen, by creating some kind of cultural and spiritual fortress.



Leonard Friesen lecturing about Mennonites in the Russian Empire during the book launch at MHM, October 25–26, 2024.

Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.

This second lecture was advertised as a discourse on Mennonites after the death of Stalin, but Friesen reached back to the origins and development of the Soviet Empire. The 1920s, when Lenin was in power, were chaotic. Religion was still relatively free, evangelism flourished, a form of capitalism was reintroduced—and disorder prevailed. Stalin, said Friesen, was just one representative of the pushback against economic and political chaos.

And then the hammer fell. During the 1920s, some Mennonites had remained hopeful about their future in the Soviet Union. After 1933, though, when Hitler began his rise to power, even the use of German in the USSR became dangerous. To willingly serve as a minister was a death sentence, and yet some did so. These were not "victims"; they had "agency"; they believed that "God was leading." Some Mennonites hid those fleeing from the state police. On the other hand, others "compromised," collectivized, worked for the state. Can we judge them for that? asked Friesen.

During World War II, Mennonites were among the multitudes sent to labour camps, such as the massive camp in Karlag, near Karaganda. The Mennonite population was now concentrated in Central Asia. And then, all ethnic Germans were recruited into the Labour Army. Mennonites, though they were by now speaking Russian, also had to suffer the horrific conditions in this *Trudovaya Armiya*; the majority of recruits were women, the men having been taken. However, Friesen said, it was ironically Stalin who now permitted the establishment of churches, be they Orthodox, Baptist or Mennonite. Churches were no longer confessional; a theology of the "necessity of suffering" was developed; the Holy Spirit became foundational. It was "old-time religion," said Friesen, "all about faith." (As a sidebar, Friesen contended that historians who have been accusing Russian Mennonites of cooperating with German fascists have a very weak case.)

After Stalin's death, Khrushchev assumed power. He has been regarded in the West as a liberator of sorts, but this "manic" politician, Friesen said, closed down churches and ordered the preaching of atheism. It didn't work. During the 1960s, the church simply went underground. Again, Mennonites—and others—refused to be "victims." Khrushchev was deposed, and under the nearly two-decade rule by Leonid Brezhnev, churches were registered and incorporated into the system. Gorbachev followed, and bungled everything, said Friesen—he sides with the Russian public on their detestation of Gorbachev's time in office. Despite loosening religious controls, one million Mennonites emigrated between 1987 and 1997.

Leonard Friesen spoke to prevailing biases and misunderstandings and turned many historical notions on their heads. Throughout, his listeners were attentive, even spellbound. It's easy to understand why he is a popular teacher on campus.

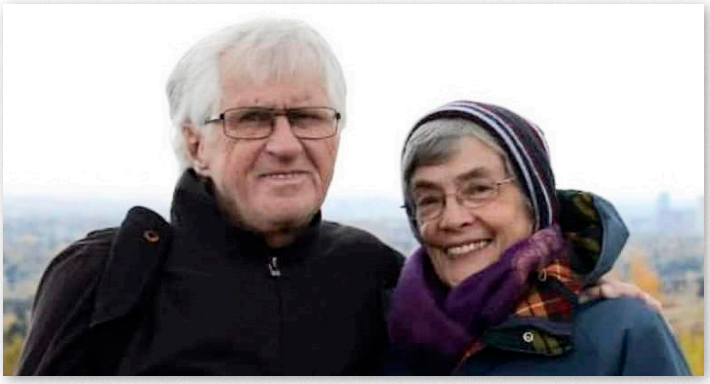
Remembering Bill Thiessen

By Robert Martens

William Thiessen, nearly always known as "Bill," was an active presence at the Mennonite Heritage Museum. Bill died November 7, 2024. He was born in 1934 in Hague, Saskatchewan, into a farming family. Always fit, Bill loved sports, excelling as a baseball pitcher and hockey goalie. In 1959 he married Marianne Dyck—he was predeceased by her, and missed her dearly.

Bill and Marianne spent several years in Nigeria during the 1960s and 1970s. Bill first taught at a remote college, then later served as country director for MCC Nigeria. Back in Canada, he earned a Masters in Anthropology. MCC remained a vital part of his life: Bill worked as executive director of MCC Alberta, and then as associate director of MCC BC.

Bill Thiessen's death leaves a big hole at the Museum.



Bill & Marianne Thiessen. Photo source: MCC files.

He was a friendly and welcoming voice at the front desk, and loved to dialogue with anyone who came to visit, no matter what their perspective might be. Bill saw the Museum as a venue where an expansive and accepting Anabaptist-Mennonite vision could be shared. His smile, affability, and devotion to his heritage and to human justice will be deeply missed. (See *Roots and Branches* June 2024 for an article by Bill about his experiences at the Museum.)

Roots & Branches

is a publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC and is mailed three times per year to all members. An annual membership is $35. Life memberships are available for $750.

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Women in a Forestry Camp. Artist: Nicolai Getman. From *The Gulag Collection | Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation.* Printed by permission. Nicolai Getman (1917–2004) was born in Kharkov, Ukraine, and graduated from the Kharkov Art College. He served in the Soviet Army during WWII. In 1945 he was arrested for anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation and sent to Kolyma, one of the most notorious prisoner camps in the Gulag. After he was freed in 1953, he decided to secretly paint about life & death in the Gulag. These paintings were finally exhibited in 1993. See p. 17 for more information.