



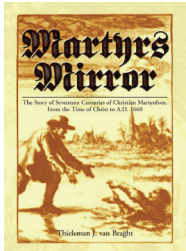
Roots & Branches

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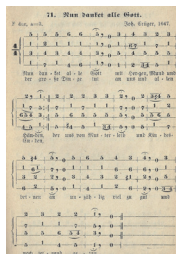
"What we have heard and known we will tell the next generation."

PSALM 78



TOP ROW:

1. *Martyrs Mirror*, 1952 edition printed in USA.
2. *Discovered Reading the Bible*, Andrees Langedul of Antwerp, the Netherlands (1559) in an etching from *Martyrs Mirror*.
3. Detail of a mural titled *Behalt* - a telling of the Anabaptist story, acknowledging women's involvement in early Anabaptism. Painted by Heinz Gaugel, Amish & Mennonite Heritage Society, Millersburg, Ohio & Plain Values Magazine. Printed by permission.



2ND ROW:

1. "Wheat Field in Manitoba." Photo credit: Julia M. Toews, 2016.
2. The hymn "Nun danket alle Gott" with music in *Ziffern* from *Choralbuch*, Raduga Press, Ukraine, 1914.
3. Program Cover for 500: *A Celebration of the Anabaptist Mennonite Story* concert, designed by Donna Klassen Thomas.
4. Indigenous musicians, Yalve Sanga, Paraguay. Photo source: Julia M. Toews, 2009.



3RD ROW:

1. *Der Menoniste*, a painting by D. Chodowiecki 1702, also entitled *The marriage proposal*, depicting a Swiss Anabaptist couple. Source: Public Domain.
2. Menno Simons' favourite Bible verse, 1 Cor. 3:11, shown here on the memorial for Menno Simons, Witmarsum, Netherlands. Watercolour by Gareth Brandt.
3. *Lily - Abram & Lena Boldt und Bramchen*. From the lithographs series *Through the Flowers* by Edith Krause, depicting suffering in Russia during Stalin's reign. Artwork located at MHM.



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4TH ROW:

1. *High School in the Valley of the Krauel River*, S.C. Brasil. Painter: Johannes Janzen. Heimat Museum, Witmarsum, Paraná, Brasil.
2. Housebarn and Fordson tractor at Mennonite Heritage Museum, Abbotsford.
3. Ocean liner, *Minnedosa*, that brought many refugees to North America. Image source: Wikipedia.

Collage design: Julia M. Toews.
Formatting: Donna Klassen Thomas.



AGM

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
JUNE 27

Friday, June 27, 2025 at 2:00PM

1818 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford, BC

Mennonite Historical Society of BC Members

Annual Reports, Discussion & Voting

Find us in the MHM Café!
The meeting will be located on the main
floor of the Mennonite Heritage Museum.



MHSBC
Mennonite Historical
Society of
British Columbia

Editorial

■ By Robert Martens

In 1660, Thieleman van Braght published *Martyrs Mirror*, or *The Bloody Theatre*, as a reminder to Mennonites of what their Anabaptist forebears had endured. Mennonites, the author felt, had adapted too easily to the prosperity of Northern European culture. He was calling them to a renewal of their faith.

The internet will tell you that *Martyrs Mirror* is a staple in Amish and Mennonite homes, but as a boy growing up in BC, I was barely acquainted with it. It wasn't at all part of our culture. When I did first stumble upon it, my reaction was mostly horror at the grisly illustrations of torture and execution.

This year, we are commemorating five hundred years of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. The world of early Anabaptists, though, might feel to us a bit alien, even quaint. Why were these young men and women so willing to be burned or drowned for their beliefs?

Those beliefs were a threat to the powers of the time. Anabaptists have been described as neither Protestant nor Catholic, and there's some truth to this. With Protestants, Anabaptists looked to the future with such ideas as individual choice, and the separation of church and state. With Catholics, Anabaptists looked backwards to the monastic values of community and simplicity.

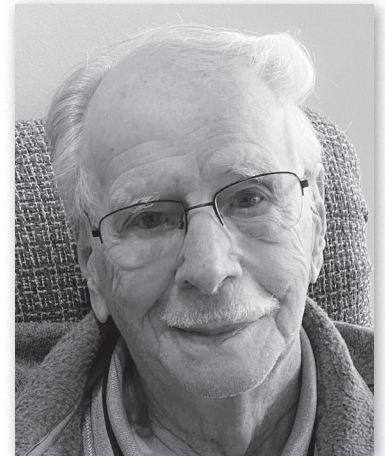
Perhaps, if van Braght were to resurrect in contemporary society, he would publish an updated version of *Martyrs Mirror*, calling us back to our roots. Perhaps he might say that it's time to pause, to appreciate our five hundred years, to be grateful for our Anabaptist legacy of powerful faith.

A Fond Farewell to George Duerksen

George Gerhard Duerksen was a familiar presence at the Mennonite Heritage Museum. Young Gerhard was a first-generation Canadian, born in 1930 in Arnaud, Manitoba to Russian Mennonite parents Gerhard and Anna (Peters) Duerksen. George made the most of it, teaching for twenty-eight years in Savona and Kamloops, and then working as a principal in Cranbrook. He married Margaret Loewen in 1955. They had three children: Cathleen, Susan, and David.

After George retired from teaching, he took on a career as a family counsellor in Abbotsford. His final retirement happened when he was in his eighties, and even then he volunteered at the Museum. Straight-backed, confident, and friendly, George was hard to miss on the Museum floor.

Clearly, he loved to talk to visitors about his Mennonite heritage—his conversations were imbued with an enthusiasm that was “uniquely George.” And he was a man of persevering faith, even during hard times. George died April 17, 2025.



George Duerksen.

Photo source: MHM files.

- **The MHSBC Annual General Meeting will take place at 2 pm, Friday, June 27, 2025 at the Mennonite Heritage Museum. Please join us in the Museum café.**

500: A Celebration of the Anabaptist Mennonite Story

Saturday, March 1, 3:30, Central Heights MB Church

■ Reported by Robert Martens

On a bright spring day, over nine hundred people packed Central Heights Church to commemorate five hundred years of the Anabaptist-Mennonite story. Richard Thiessen, president of MHSBC, told a very compressed version of that history; he was given, he said, fifteen minutes to tell the story of five hundred years. In segments, related between musical numbers,

Thiessen described those five centuries: the Anabaptist beginnings in 1525, the peasant revolts, the violent uprising at Münster, the martyrs, Menno Simons. Then, the Mennonite migration to Poland in search of tolerance, the further migration to “New Russia”—present-day Ukraine—the emigration to Canada in the 1870s, the growth of missions among Mennonites who stayed, the disaster of World War I and the flight to



Calvin Dyck and orchestra during 500: A Celebration of the Anabaptist Mennonite Story.

Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.

Canada of over twenty thousand. The catastrophe of Stalin, of World War II, the escape from the USSR of thousands of Mennonites in 1943. Finally, settlement in BC, Yarrow as its first refugee Mennonite village, the populating of “Poverty Flats”—now Abbotsford—new ethnic churches, the Mennonite social conscience and MCC.

But music was at the heart of this particular afternoon. Calvin Dyck, Fraser Valley music activist and recipient of the Order of Abbotsford, conducted the Abbotsford Youth Orchestra. Ben Ewert led the combined forces of the Trinity Western University Choir and the Masterworks Chorus; the latter consists of TWU faculty, staff, alumni, and some community members. Ewert is director of choral activities and professor of music at TWU, and also leads at St. John’s Vancouver Anglican Church.

The program actually started with the audience and the singing of “Praise God from whom all blessings flow” in heartfelt four-part harmony. First for the choir was J. S. Bach’s deliriously joyful “Jauchzet, frohlocket” from his *Christmas Oratorio*. This was followed by another oratorio excerpt, this time from Felix Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*. Serenity epitomized: “He watching over Israel slumbers not nor sleeps.”

A commemorative concert: Larry Nickel’s composition for choir and orchestra “Melodies from Molotschna” was a dive into the soul of early Russian Mennonite colonization: “Come weary and sorrow oppressed”; “A

clean heart create in me.” Sentiments of faith that have survived for centuries. The following number was a dip into modern idiom. “Exalted” was written by David Squires, a professor of music at TWU who is interested in ancient Christian Celtic roots but leans into new musical idioms. A fascinating work, filled with praise.

At this point, the choir left the stage and the musicians took over. Calvin Dyck conducted the fourth movement of Mendelssohn’s *Reformation Symphony*, thematically based on Luther’s “A mighty fortress is our God.” A composition of trust and confidence, music for troubled times.

But the major feature of the afternoon was the *Mennonite Piano Concerto*, written on commission by Victor Davies to commemorate the 450th anniversary of the Anabaptist-Mennonite story in 1975, and premiered that year in Winnipeg. The piano soloist was Paul Williamson, born in Mission and now working on his doctorate at Northwestern University. Williamson, a frequent music competition prizewinner and included in the 2017 list of CBC’s “30 Hot Canadian Classical Musicians under 30,” lit up the house. The *Mennonite Piano Concerto* is based on Mennonite *Kernlieder*, the mainstay hymns of the Mennonite tradition. The first movement alternates between threat and grace, danger and tranquillity, or “doubt and faith,” as Calvin Dyck expressed it. The second movement is simply ineffable, a series of variations on “Wehrlos und verlassen,” or “In the rifted rock.” Profoundly grieving yet serene. And

then the rollicking final movement, jokey and playful, brings the symphony to an abrupt and comic conclusion. No doubt about the mastery displayed in the performance: there was an instant standing ovation. The

singing of “Now thank we all our God” brought the concert to a close.

Huge thanks to the performers, volunteers, and generous donors for making the event possible.

Gallery Opening: *Unearthing the Vanished: Mennonite Experiences in Stalin’s Great Terror*
7 pm, 8 May 2025, Mennonite Heritage Museum. Exhibit open to September 26, 2025

■ Reported by Robert Martens

A large crowd attended the gallery opening of an exhibit created and mounted by Louise Bergen Price, Janet Boldt, and Richard Thiessen, with the critical support of volunteers and Museum staff. It’s a disturbing exhibit, focused on the deaths and “disappearances” of thousands of Mennonites during the Great Terror of 1937-38 in Stalinist Russia. Panels telling their stories are complemented by the intense artwork of the late Hilda Janzen Goertzen.

After a few words of welcome by Office Manager Jennifer Martens, Robert Martens spoke briefly on the necessity of remembering those who were victimized. Louise Bergen Price then took the mike. She recounted being “haunted” by the absence of her mother’s father, and finally tearfully discovering from NKVD files that he had been executed.

Louise took her idea of an exhibit on the Great Terror to Museum Director Richard Thiessen, who readily accepted the proposal. Janet Boldt joined the project team and Jenny Bergen helped with graphic design.

Janet spoke of being “outside of Mennonite circles” for many years—an exhibit such as this one



Louise Price speaking at the opening of the exhibit *Unearthing the Vanished* at MHM, May 8, 2025.

Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.



Layers of Time. Artist: Hilda Janzen Goertzen. This painting represents the various experiences of Mennonites during their stay in Russia: difficulty, prosperity, exile, and eventually freedom for some.

wouldn’t have particularly interested her at the time. She was aware of some kind of connection with Louise. Eventually, she realized that they were related through their grandparents. Forebears of both Janet and Louise perished during the Great Terror.

The formal part of the event ended with a few words from Louise. Victimization, she said, continues on a globe ravaged by war and maltreatment of refugees; this provided additional motivation for honouring the victims of Stalin’s totalitarian regime.

The evening ended with lots of food, talk, and wanderings through the exhibit. It was a community event.

January 21, 1525

■ By Robert Martens

“Anabaptist” was the nickname given to a group of Christians in the sixteenth century. It simply meant one who baptizes again. A person could not be called a dirtier name in sixteenth century Christian Europe. (Klaassen 1)

Adult baptism was the primary marker of the early Anabaptist movement, but what other beliefs held these early Reformers together remains something of an enigma. Anabaptists were an incredibly diverse bunch. Agreement on theological matters might emerge from a whirlpool of divergent ideas, but internal conflict

was the norm. Even the origins of Anabaptism are hard to pin down. First, it developed as a renewal movement within the Catholic Church: among other things, the idea of the community as exemplified in monasticism, the believer's ear attuned to the Holy Spirit as Catholic mystics had done, and the daily practice of Christian living taught by the Catholic thinker and reformer Thomas á Kempis in his book *The Imitation of Christ*. Second, Anabaptists obviously were following the lead of the Protestant Reformation: freedom of conscience, individual independence, reliance on Scripture. Finally, the Anabaptist movement was a strong reflection of the Peasants' War of 1524-25 (Roth 3). Though it was eventually committed to non-violence, Anabaptism was deeply immersed in the social issues of the time.

Baptism as an adult upon confession of faith, however, was a fundamental Anabaptist belief shared by every faction of this profoundly diverse movement. Today, baptism in the Anabaptist-Mennonite community has become almost a matter of routine, an initiation into the church and into adulthood. For the early Anabaptists, adult baptism was anything but routine. It was an open and defiant response to the Catholic Church's policy of infant baptism, through which everyone became a member of the Christian and political community. Anabaptists insisted on baptism only after an adult acknowledgment of faith. This was a direct challenge to the fading authority of medieval Europe, both theologically and sociologically, and its consequences could well mean torture and execution.

Anabaptism had its lunatic factions. There were the reformers of St. Gall, who babbled like infants in order to become like children, as Jesus had preached. There were those who claimed they were sons of God and prophets of the Apocalypse (Klaassen 2). And the sense of their own rightness, and righteousness, was regrettable. "Their conviction that they were the true church was as unpleasant and as unjustified in them as in others," writes Walter Klaassen (3). On the other hand, it must be remembered that many Anabaptists were young

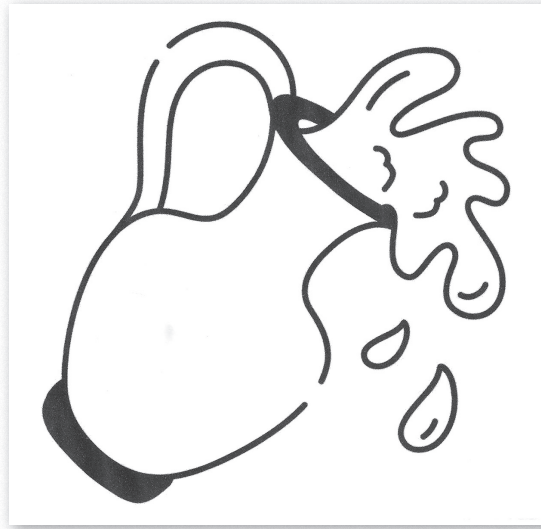
and perhaps reckless, and the movement as a whole was feeling its way. The genuineness and courage of the first young Anabaptist reformers in Zurich where it all started is indisputable.

Huldreich (or Ulrich) Zwingli was a leading figure in the Council of Zurich in the 1520s. He was also a reformer, breaking with Catholic authorities over issues such as communion and confession, and he defended the individual's right to read Scripture on their own. To that end, he engaged in passionate discussion and debate with young Anabaptist rebels Felix Manz and Conrad Grebel and their cohorts. Zwingli was also a consummate politician

who viewed social stability as a priority, and Manz and Grebel eventually tired of his prudence—his unwillingness to take a stand, as they viewed it. In fact, they insisted that a "Christian" state was no better than any other. The early "debating club" of Zwingli, Manz, Grebel and others was doomed to break down. And it did so, finally and irreparably, after it came to light that adults were being "rebaptized" in Witikon and Zollikon, villages just outside of Zurich. Zwingli and the Council now doubled down: Anabaptists were forbidden to meet in groups.

"Rebaptizing" had for some time been a central issue. Conrad Grebel wrote in a 1524 letter to violent rebel Thomas Müntzer, "Baptism is described in the Scriptures to mean that the sins of the one to be baptized (who is repenting and believing both before and after) are washed away through faith and the blood of Christ." Later in 1524, he (or it may have been Manz) wrote, "...I have now clearly learned and know of a surety that baptism is nothing else than a dying to the old man and the putting on of a new.... I should like to listen to anyone who, out of the Scriptures, can prove to me clearly and in truth that John, Christ, or the apostles baptized children or taught that they should be baptized" (Bender 3-4).

And so it was that on a darkening winter day, fifteen men gathered at the home of Felix Manz. It was January 21, 1525. The mother of Felix Manz opened the door and



Water for baptism. Image source: Freepick (edited).

welcomed them. The meeting was top-secret. Zwingli knew nothing about it. Fifteen young men, probably terrified, yet unrelenting. Persisting no matter what. Fervent speech, eyes glowing. The conversation, in those feverish conditions, must have seemed surreal. Then suddenly, as the story goes, a decision was made. “And it came to pass that they were together until anxiety came upon them, yes, they were so pressed within their hearts. Thereupon they began to bow their knees to the Most High God in heaven and called upon Him as the Informer of Hearts and they prayed that He would give to them his divine will and that He would show mercy unto them. For flesh and blood and human forwardness did not drive them, since they knew well what they would have to suffer on account of it” (qtd. in Owen 1). And after that intense prayer, one of them, Georg Blaurock, asked Conrad Grebel to baptize him. Grebel did so. Blaurock then baptized all the others. The men must have left that meeting with both euphoria and terror in their hearts.

From there, the early reformist Anabaptist movement spread, and at first rapidly, despite ferocious harassment. Grebel would die of the plague. Manz was drowned in the Limmat River for his “heresy” while his mother looked on. Blaurock was burned at the stake. Thousands of Anabaptists were executed for their beliefs. For some,

the Schleithem Confession, written by a convening of Anabaptists in 1527, might mark the beginning of the movement that would eventually be called Mennonite, after Menno Simons. But it is perhaps more convincing that the dark and smitten night of January 21, 1525, five hundred years ago, is the true marker, and baptism—free personal choice within a community—lay at the heart of it.

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“Women should not speak in church”

■ By Gareth Brandt

I grew up in a conservative Mennonite congregation where only men were allowed to speak and lead. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 was read literally and universally: “Women should not speak in church.” Preaching and even reading Scripture or leading the singing were reserved only for men. We had “brotherhood meetings” where men got together to make decisions for the church. Women could “ask their husbands at home” and support their husbands in their leadership roles or get involved in making blankets and food or teaching children. Thus, as a university-educated budding feminist, I came to despise the Mennonite tradition because I saw it as a male-dominated, patriarchal, hopelessly out of date tradition. Sadly, I knew nothing of its origins!

Although the culture of western Europe was deeply patriarchal in the sixteenth century and most of the early Anabaptist leaders were men, women were prominent

players in the origins of Anabaptism. A scan of *Martyrs Mirror* demonstrates that about one-third of Anabaptist martyrs were women. In the Tirol region of Austria, almost half of the Anabaptists arrested between 1525 and 1531 were women. Linda Huebert Hecht and Arnold Snyder, in their book, *Profiles of Anabaptist Women*, recount the stories of many of these women who were vocal about their faith and vitally involved in the life of the church, including preaching and teaching roles.

Women were more central to the Anabaptist movement than to other groups at the time; as Myron Augsburger writes, “In the state churches, Catholic and Protestant, the attitude toward women was as yet quite medieval and remained so for many years. However, in Anabaptist circles women were referred to as sisters, and were held in the highest respect. The freedom with which they lived and associated with the men in the work of the church accounts for the incorrect and

slandorous charge made by the opponents that the Anabaptists had their women in common.... Anabaptist women were not a bit behind the Anabaptist men in understanding the interpretation of the gospel or in steadfast suffering for the truth of Christ.”

Why was this the case? A few factors contributed to this. The first was simply a sociology of communication. Although the printing press revolutionized communication and ignited the Reformation, oral communication was prominent among the lower classes to which most Anabaptists belonged. Most of the preaching and evangelization by Anabaptists was done in a medieval, communal, oral and aural mode. This put men and women on the same level. Among other groups, a greater percentage of men were educated and thus more dominant.

The communal lifestyle of early Anabaptists enabled women to be equal partners among them. The nature of Anabaptist communities involved economic sharing and recognized the prophetic gifts of all people, not just ordained leaders. All people were involved in Bible study and spiritual discernment. In fact, because the women lived and associated so freely with the men in the work of the church, the Anabaptists were often slanderously accused by their opponents of having their women in common!

Helena von Freyburg hosted a church in her home. She was likely first exposed to Anabaptism in late 1527 and was baptized in March 1528, perhaps at the same occasion as a more well-known Anabaptist leader, Pilgram Marpeck. The two of them were prominent members of the same congregation in Rattenberg for a time and worked together on some projects, although neither was the pastor. Soon after her baptism, Helena von Freyburg made the castle where she lived a centre for Anabaptist activity. She visited Anabaptist prisoners, provided financial support, led Bible studies, and was



The influence of women in early Anabaptist history shown here in a section of the mural *Behalt*, describing early Anabaptist history. Painter Heinz Gaugel.

Printed by permission from the Amish & Mennonite Heritage Society, Millersburg, Ohio and *Plain Values Magazine*.

an intermediary between Anabaptist preachers and the nobility.

The calling of the Spirit upon all members was another thing that levelled the playing field among Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. Linda Huebert Hecht asserts that “[t]he calling of the Spirit which provided the foundation for the Anabaptist movement was radically egalitarian and personal, even though it led individuals into a commitment to a community.” Women received the same call to salvation, baptism and discipleship that men did. Margaret Hottinger took the call of the Spirit personally and was arrested and eventually executed for her bold preaching!

“The concept of the priesthood of all believers among Anabaptists elevated women to a role of partnership in the congregation of believers,” Augsburg writes. Although Luther trumpeted the priesthood of all believers, the Anabaptists actually practised it. Anabaptist fellowships emphasized mutual, horizontal relationships and the removal of the ministerial hierarchy that marked the state churches. They did not believe that certain people had more spiritual authority than others—all people were required to be faithful disciples. Women had both the responsibility and the privilege of being involved in all aspects of church they were gifted for. May it be so today.

Anabaptists in the British Isles

■ By Robert Martens

All the doyings of the Anabaptists do breath and savour tumult and confusion of all thynges.

-Heinrich Bullinger, 1551 (qtd. in Pauls 62)

The Quenes Maiestie ... Wylleth and chargeth all maner of persons borne eyther in forreine partes, or in her Maiestie's dominions, that have conceived any maner of such hereticall opinions the Anabaptistes do holde, and meaneth not by charitable teachynge to be reconciled, to depart out of this Realme within twenty dayes

-Proclamation of Queen Elizabeth I, 1560 (qtd. in Pauls 62)

Anabaptists in the British Isles? Their presence in England is rarely noted, and many Mennonites may be unaware that it occurred at all. Indeed the numbers of British Anabaptists were small at any given time, but in an era of religious ferment and the constant threat of revolution, they were taken very seriously by the English authorities as a threat to civil order. Many in fact died at the stake—whether they were in fact genuine Anabaptists or not: the term was used generally to smear perceived enemies of the Crown. But Anabaptism was sometimes feared for good reason in those years, especially after the violent uprising in Münster, much as “Islamist terrorism” would be feared today. Hence even small numbers of Anabaptists provoked enormous political attention. And although they didn’t eventually survive as a separate English congregation, Anabaptists may have played a substantial role in the development of English Protestantism.

They had predecessors, of course; dissenting movements don’t appear out of thin air. Reformers in the 1300s had been energized by John Wycliffe and his translation of the Bible into English, and soon became known as Lollards, a term intended by their enemies as a term of abuse: the word is likely derived from the Middle Dutch *lollaerd*, meaning mumbler, mutterer. The Lollards had no central belief system. Generally, they questioned the mass, disliked rituals and images, denounced war, abortion, and capital punishment, and awaited the imminent return of Jesus and divine justice in the end times. At first protected by a nobleman named John of Gaunt, they eventually faced severe

persecution after John Ball led the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 in the name of Lollardy.

The Lollards bear some striking resemblances to their later Anabaptist counterparts, and certainly, in England at least, the two influenced each other. But Lollardy was slipping away just as Anabaptism became perceived as the great threat to public security. Anabaptism in the Isles did not derive directly from Lollardism, but was the result of two major waves of flight from persecution on the European continent. The first occurred in 1535–36, after the seizure of Münster by Anabaptists in the belief that the Lord would return there. Consequently, Anabaptists were hunted down as terrorists are today, and many fled for the English port cities; some took shelter in the relative anonymity of London. It was a time, however, of religious upheaval in England as well: Henry VIII, partly over a marriage dispute with Rome, broke with Catholicism, dissolved and seized the assets of numerous monasteries and convents, and had himself proclaimed the Supreme Head of the Church of England.

The political unrest, however, ran much deeper than that. England was trying to establish itself as an independent country and a European power while under threat from Spain, which was finding friends in Catholic Ireland. The Spanish were to be finally defeated when their Armada was decimated off the English coast in 1588. Before that, however, the Tudor monarchs, who had only taken control of the Isles after the War of the Roses, felt compelled to strengthen their position and to maintain social order. Perhaps it was understandable, after the Anabaptist debacle at Münster, and amidst the continuing political and religious turmoil both in Britain and on the Continent, that the British authorities might overreact to perceived subversion. And in fact the nightmare of social breakdown would eventually be fulfilled: the country’s peace was shattered by civil war beginning in 1642. In 1649 the Puritan “Rump Parliament,” led by Protestant revolutionary Oliver Cromwell, tried King Charles I for treason and had him beheaded.

Under Henry’s reign (1535–46), however, towns such as Hull at first became havens for fleeing Anabaptists. This was primarily for economic reasons, as the influx of talented and hard-working Dutch/Flemish refugees seemed to be good for business. But the intelligent and

charismatic King Henry was something of a “flip flopper.” In 1538 he received a letter from two German nobleman—but composed by the famous Lutheran reformer Melancthon—on the Anabaptist menace, and the king immediately cracked down. He ordered the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer “to search for and examine Anabaptists ... and destroy all books of that detestable sect” (Horst 2). Although Henry’s persecution was moderate when compared with what was happening on the Continent, it is said that more Anabaptists were burned during his reign than all Lollards in the previous century (Horst 1). One such victim was an Anabaptist leader, Jan Mathijsz van Middelburg, burned at Smithfield in November 29, 1538; on the same day, Peter Franke and his wife died at the stake in separate locations.

Then Henry again changed his mind, at least partially. In 1539 he issued a proclamation of pardon for all heretics, except those from abroad (including of course those from the Dutch and Flemish Lowlands). Why the sudden alteration in policy? Perhaps Henry discovered that he had gone too far, and that harsh oppression was winning sympathy for the dissident cause. Perhaps it was, once again, a matter of economics. A second pardon was offered to English subjects in 1540, but Anabaptists were still not in the clear. This pardon specifically exempted such Anabaptist heresies as the refusal to “beare office of rule in the Commen Welth,” the principle of “nonswearing of oaths,” and the belief “that all things be held in common” (Horst 2). At least several burnings followed.

During the following reign of Edward VI (1547-53), Anabaptism finally dared show its face, and its writings were publicly available. This happened despite an official policy of intolerance and several executions. Thomas Cranmer, who served as Archbishop of Canterbury from 1533 to 1555, plays a strikingly tolerant role in this era. He believed strongly in the power of persuasion rather than suppression. In 1549 he and several other church associates publicly debated with Anabaptists in St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, and apparently managed three of them to change their views. One of them who did not was Joan (or Jane) Boucher, who was probably a lady of some social standing and influence, and hence would have been a primary focus of the debate. After a lengthy



John Wycliffe giving his translation of the Bible to his Lollard followers in this 19th-century painting by William Frederick Yeames.
Image source: Public domain.

stay in prison, however, her refusal to recant led her to the stake.

Despite the newfound “tolerance,” Anabaptists never formed their own congregations in the British Isles, staying away from the emerging Protestant churches labelled as Separatist. In part this may have been due to Lollard influence, which had never in principle sought the formation of a new church. Or it may have had something to do with the “spiritualist” nature of these Lowlands Anabaptists, who were more inclined to cooperate nondogmatically with other reformers. The evidence, actually, is scanty; perhaps efforts *were* made to establish Anabaptist congregations, and these might have failed due to scant Anabaptist numbers, or to official disapproval. One Anabaptist leader, Henry Hart, author of two religious tracts, was in fact described by Kentish secretaries as being among “the first that made separation from the reformed church of England” (Horst 3).

In 1550 a Strangers Church (Reformed) for foreigners was established at Austin Friars in London on the orders of Edward VI in order to contain dissent within a single organization. The king recorded in his journal that the objective was “the avoyding of al sectes of Anabaptistes and such like” (Horst 2). The Strangers Church existed in a grey zone just beyond the control of the State Church. “Ironically these congregations were far more reformed in actual fact than anything officially allowed under the current Church regulations” (“English” 4). Anabaptists often worshipped with the Strangers, but

apparently were not averse to attending other smaller congregations as well, and their beliefs and faith thus infiltrated England from the bottom up. It might be a mistake to think of the Strangers Church as an exercise in tolerance; it was more of a policy of expedience, as “the Crown needed foreign artisans and business in England” (“English” 4). And perhaps it might be seen as typical English compromise. In this case, money cheerfully trumped religion.

Heavy opposition was, however, also part of the Edward era. Anti-Anabaptist tracts by Heinrich Bullinger (an associate of Reformer Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland) and John Calvin were translated into English. A French Reformer, Jean Veron, was the translator and editor of Bullinger’s writings, and he later engaged in public debate with English Anabaptist leader Robert Cooche. Bullinger was translated as saying that Anabaptist doctrine teaches “that it is not lawful for christianes to be magistrates bycause christianes do not contende in the market, neither do kyl any man, neyther seke again there goodes taken awaye, neither revenge their injuries” (qtd. in Pauls 66). Fridericus Staphylus wrote of the Anabaptist heresy “that no man could be compelled to any faith: that al Christen men are free, and taught of God him selfe immediately: that there nedeth no interpretation of Scripture, but it is al plaine and perspicuous: that a simple man of the country can more readily expounde and understande holy scripture, than any Doctour in divinitie” (qtd. in Pauls 65). And an anonymous English satirist parodied Anabaptists as avowing, “We are free from bloudshed, and will not kill, no not a Louse; nor do we hold it fit that any should be punished for his infirmities” (qtd. in Pauls 66).

The reign of “Bloody Queen Mary” (1553–58), in which the Catholic Church was reinstated and Protestants hunted down, might have been expected to put an end to British Anabaptism. (Thomas Cranmer himself was arrested for heresy and burned after two years in prison.) Indeed many did die at the stake, although once again, any religious enemy of the Crown could be smeared by the catch-all epithet “Anabaptist.” Henry Hart did spend time in jail, where he apparently engaged in religious debate with fellow prisoners. Yet the movement managed to survive. Bishop Jewel wrote, “We found at the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth a large and inauspicious crop of Ariens, anabaptists, and other pests, which I know not how, but as mushrooms

spring up in the night and the darkness, so these spring up in that darkness and unhappy night of the Marian times” (qtd. in Horst 3).

England now achieved, under the shrewd reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603), a power it had never before known. Anabaptism, on the other hand, seemed from this point on to decline. Elizabeth issued yet another proclamation against these dissidents, ordering them to conform or leave the country; the law specifically mentioned “the Anabaptists and such Hereticks, which had flocked to the Coast-Towns of England from the parts beyond the Seas, under colour of shunning Persecution” (Horst 3). In fact, between 1567 and 1573, the second wave of Anabaptist refugees from the European northern Lowlands was taking place as the Spanish Duke of Alba mounted a brutal suppression of non-Catholic believers. And Elizabeth offered her own version of state intolerance. In 1575, about twenty Dutch Anabaptists were arrested: according to reports, fourteen were banished, one scourged, and two burned “in great terror, weeping and crying” (qtd. in Horst 3). Members of the Austin Friars Strangers Church interceded, but to little effect.

During the succeeding reign of James I (1603–25), Anabaptists were tolerated if they abided by the law. The last burning took place in 1612. It has been speculated that tolerance eventually killed Anabaptism, that the movement lost its vigour as dissent slowly became integrated into the English way of life. But Anabaptist ideas did not disappear. For example, an early Separatist congregation was founded in Gainsborough in 1606 under the leadership of John Smyth. These dissenters were hounded from England and fled to Amsterdam, where they were befriended by Mennonites. In 1609 Smyth was baptized in the Mennonite way, and thus the first Baptist congregation was born. After the return in 1611 of this tiny congregation to England under a new leader, Thomas Helwys—Smyth had died—Baptist churches proliferated, and flourished, in both England and Ireland.

So Anabaptism left its mark on Separatist churches, such as Baptists and Congregationalists, which held to the separation of church and state. It also influenced the general upsurge in Protestant activity and thought, and its ideas can be found in the freethinker writings of John Milton. The English Civil War (1642–51), captained by the Puritan Oliver Cromwell, was a consequence of the Protestant ferment of this era. It has been argued that

“the English Puritan Left can be understood only when we realize that it drew much of its inspiration directly from the Swiss, German, and Dutch Anabaptists.... Anabaptism in England was no spiritual backwater ... but ... a ferment of religious ideas which were finally absorbed into both English and American church and secular history” (Horst 5). It has also been noted that, during the Civil War, a number of so-called Baptists crossed over to the Quakers upon deciding that they did not wish to participate in violence (Horst 4). The Anabaptist ideal of nonresistance had somehow persisted, albeit in different forms. The small work of a small group of individuals may have exerted an influence, beyond its numbers, upon the forces of history.

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Edmund Spenser.

Photo source: Wikipedia.

Anabaptists appear, at one point, to be the object of derision in Edmund Spenser’s (1553-99) masterpiece, *The Faerie Queene*. This long and beautiful

epic poem is allegorical in nature, and depicts virtuous heroes defeating the monsters of vice. Spenser was extremely conservative in his politics, and may even have counselled a scorched earth policy against Irish rebels. *The Faerie Queene* was written, in part, as a flattering tribute to Queen Elizabeth I.

Spenser believed in the innate goodness of the natural and temporal order, and that to try to upset that order was to violate the will of God. In Book V of his poem, the good knight Artegall meets up with a giant who wants to level the forces of nature and politics. Artegall then takes him up in debate. The giant replies in terms that would have been recognized as “Anabaptist” or “leveller” in the Elizabethan era.

Thou foolish Elfe (said then the Gyant wroth)
Seest not, how badly all things present bee,
And each estate quite out of order goth?
The sea it selfe doest thou not plainely see
Encroch uppon the land there under thee;
And th’earth it selfe how daily its increast,
By all that dying to it turned be?
Were it not good that wrong were then surceast,
And from the most, that some were given to the least?

Therefore I will throw downe these mountaines hie,
And make them levell with the lowly plaine:
These towring rocks, which reach unto the skie,
I will thrust downe into the deepest maine,
And as they were, them equalize againe.
Tyrants that make men subject to their law,
I will suppress, that they no more may raine;
And Lordings curbe, that commons over-awe;
And all the wealth of rich men to the poore will drawe.

Undeterred, the goodly knight Artegall duels with the giant and throws him off a cliff into the sea:

So downe the cliffe the wretched Gyant tumbled;
His battred ballances in peeces lay,
His timbered bones all broken rudely rumbled,
So was the high aspyring with huge ruine humbled.

(Book V, Canto II, Stanzas 37, 38, 50)

Source

[luminarium.org. https://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/queene5.html](https://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/queene5.html)

Peter Langendijk and Swiss Simplicity

■ Introduced by Robert Martens

In 1713, Peter Langendijk, a Dutch writer well-known both in Mennonite circles and in broader society, wrote a satirical poem with the lengthy title, “Swiss Simplicity, Lamenting the Corrupt Manners of Many Dutch Mennonites, or Nonresistant Christians” (*Zwitserse Eenvoudigheid, Klaagende over de bedorvene Zeden veeler Hollandse Doopsgezinden, Of Weerlose Christenen*). The poem expresses the shock of a “simple” Swiss Anabaptist fleeing persecution in her homeland to the security of Holland, only to find that some Dutch Mennonites seem to have relinquished their original ideals in favour of wealth and conspicuous consumption. At the time he wrote this poem, Langendijk himself had achieved a very comfortable living. “Swiss Simplicity” might have been directed partially at himself.

Pieter Langendijk (pronounced long-en-dike) was born in Haarlem in 1683 to a Quaker mother and a Mennonite father. His father died shortly after Pieter was born, and the boy and his mother endured subsistence living for many years. Nevertheless, Pieter received an excellent education when his mother sent him to a school run by William Sewel, an eminent Quaker historian whose grandfather had emigrated to the Netherlands to escape English harassment.

Forced by poverty, Pieter Langendijk worked in his mother’s linen shop for a time, and after her death moved on to employment in linen factories owned by wealthy Mennonite Anthony van Hoeck. van Hoeck resided in the so-called “Mennonite Heaven,” a cluster of mansions near the Vecht River in the province of Utrecht. Langendijk trained as a designer of damask patterns but soon became known for his occasional poetry, written for events such as marriages and deaths. His employer, van Hoeck, took an interest in the young man and acted, to an extent, as Langendijk’s patron.

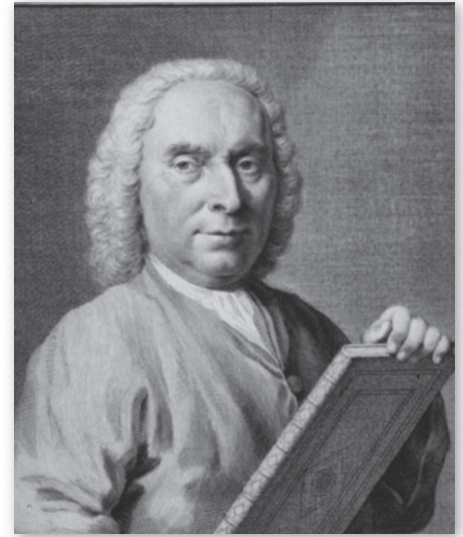
Over the next years Langendijk achieved fame for his poetry, but far more for his plays, satirical comedies that skewered the Dutch elite. His most successful play was *Het wederzijds huwelijksbedrog* (The Mutual Betrayal in Wedlock), a comedy with a complex plot involving four lying lovers. Langendijk’s dramas were performed on Dutch stages for a century after his death in 1756. Apparently, he only formally joined the Mennonite church shortly before he died.

Swiss authorities had a long history of making things difficult for Mennonites and Amish. In fact, angered that Mennonites refused to bear arms or enrol in the state church, the Swiss government was determined to

obliterate the presence of Mennonites in their country. Dutch Mennonites, prosperous and generous, organized to negotiate better conditions for their Swiss counterparts, but to no avail. A number of Amish and Mennonites fled to Holland; few of them stayed in the Lowlands, however, most of them eventually moving on to North America. The heroine of Langendijk’s poem, “Swiss Simplicity,” is one of these Swiss refugees.

The following translation is by Irvin and Ava Horst and appeared in *Mennonite Life* in 1955. Irvin Horst was a historian in Anabaptist studies; he taught at Eastern Mennonite University and the University of Amsterdam. His wife, Ava, was involved in some of his writing and research. Their translation of “Swiss Simplicity” is literal and does not attempt to replicate the rhyme and meter of the original. Langendijk wrote his poem in heroic couplets (iambic pentameter) used by great English poets such as Geoffrey Chaucer and Alexander Pope. He was known for his skill in language; that skill doesn’t translate well. And does he perhaps cast a satirical eye upon the simply-clothed narrator as well as the fancy rich? Still, the poem asks questions that are still pertinent to our time: how has wealth affected twenty-first century Mennonites? how faithful have they been to their original ideals?

Fair Simplicity, pure maid of heaven, from Menno’s
church long vanished,
Has reappeared, not in fine attire, rustling in silk,
Nor after the latest fashion—but in a peasant’s garb.
How could she deck herself with finery



Pieter Langendijk.

Image source: Wikipedia.

Who is not awake to base desires
 But rather learned to suffer and renounce herself?
 Oh no, such vanity is pursued by those
 Who flatter worldly minds with earthly treasures.
 She boasts not of her wealth;
 The prison was her dress, chains her lace,
 Her pearls were tears, and her table dainties
 Reproach, persecution, pain and a cross.
 In her house she trod no marble floors nor East
 Indian mats,
 She had no iron chest full of gold or extorted money,
 She served no fruit in painted porcelain,
 Nor poured her wine in cut glass full to the brim
 In luxury and excess, but rather to refresh herself.
 She had no coach with trotting horses
 When hither coming down the Rhine in boats,
 And saw with alarm the brethren at Amsterdam
 In unrestrained pomp, which brought tears to her
 eyes,
 And moved her to lament with two complaints:

I.

Is this the selfsame land for which I longed
 When I was bound in chains and shackles?
 Do my eyes deceive me? Are these the selfsame brethren
 Who helped me in my need, with God, preservers of
 my people?
 Generosity indeed made them known to my people;
 This ray of virtue, though, shines through a sombre
 cloud
 Of needless quarrel and church wrangling,
 Engendering discord and neglect.
 Oh fallen ones, you are the cause of my mourning
 And the rending of my simple dress in many pieces,
 When I find here churches, sheepfolds,
 Wherein wolves hide themselves. Oh wretched ones!
 Buried in the diamond rubble of the world, the
 gleaming evil,
 Before which befogged the sun of virtue goes down!
 You preach nonresistance, while bearing the banners
 Of the Flemish armies and the Waterlander hosts,
 Armed with contention, armoured with the ban,
 Each with a sharp tongue, which hearts can wound,
 Direct a war, not to destroy nations
 Or precious human blood, no, but what is
 worse—souls.
 You think this word is hard? Still harder is your strife.

Oh were the rent made whole, the stain wiped off
 The garment of truth! Could but the wound be healed
 And God's church be one in heart and soul!
 The bride of Christ would then lift up her precious
 head,
 She would erect a new Jerusalem in her heart,
 She who never bowed her knee in Babylon,
 And see herself free from exile and from anguish.
 Many a sheep now straying in the desert
 Would then be found. Great joy would follow.
 This concerns you most, oh angels of the church,
 Who half-hearted placed not upon the candlestick
 The light of peace, the precious jewel of the church.
 But you know well the failure in that work.
 Put your hands to the plough; work zealously in
 God's acre;
 Be not half-hearted, nor drowsy, but awake.
 Then the weeds which flourish now
 Will be uprooted by your constant vigilance.
 Then the light of peace will illumine the peace church
 And all mists before her glory disappear.

2.

How many a "doll" we see in gay attire
 When walking with our people on the street!
 See, here comes one now, strutting like a peacock.
 For shame, half-clothed, with naked shoulders!
 Shut, children, shut your eyes. But say, where is she
 going?
 Oh, to the church! Not for worship I surmise,
 But rather to display her fine attire
 And with seducing gaze attract her lover
 Who powdered white his woman-like hair
 And thus his lewdness equals hers.
 This sort object to their given names
 As being old-fashioned and too commonly used:
 Mennonites "Sirs" and "Madams" flatter them more;
 Then their refinement is placed in the best light,
 Names in tune with clinking of money,
 With wantonness, haughtiness, and the adornment of
 their bodies.
 Someone will say that actually the evil exists less
 In clothing than in the wanton mind,
 And that pride exists no more in fine laces
 Than in high hats or narrow neckbands,
 That each should be clothed according to his station,
 The meaner sort in coarser cloth, the rich in fine.

True, they thus contrive to remain in good light,
 But can't one see their evil nature by their evil lives?
 Is not glittering clothing a mirror of the heart,
 A heart confounded with vanity and pride?
 And though pride may reside in humble clothing,
 There is less occasion for conceding to temptation.
 In fine clothing one dares much that is improper
 For which in humble clothing one would be ashamed.
 Come, follow me, if you like. I'll show you an
 example.

Here we stand before a house where modish people
 dwell,
 Alas, of Menno's folk (at least they bear his name)!
 Here everything is grand. What an array of coaches!
 They are the fashion. What shuffling and commotion!
 How properly the gentleman greets that lady
 And graciously leads her up the steps!
 Here we must go in. With all the noise and crowd
 We'll likely not be noticed.
 This is a great affair. No amateurs are here
 But masters in the art of worldly vanity.
 Here is much complimenting, favouring, flattery.
 The bride and bridegroom show themselves with
 pride.
 What do you think, will any of my sort be here?
 Are humility and good morals honoured here
 Instead of pride and vanity? No, not at all.
 Softly now, move aside. With rhythm of music and
 singing
 There will be skipping and dancing.
 Herodias has returned. She swings and glides,

Moving around the floor as if she is teaching
 How to use the sword on a John the Baptist's neck
 And offer the head upon a platter to her mother;
 But that is not her intention. She only wants to
 spread a net
 To catch the bird she set her eye upon.
 How the wine goes to the young men's heads!
 (Pardon, they are "gentlemen.")
 How they glut on pastries! What rumpling of
 clothing!
 What romping, what feasting! All pleasure!
 For shame! It's revolting! Let us leave.
 Alas, I fear and tremble. Oh my brethren in the faith,
 Dare you thus to trample simplicity underfoot?
 You stray from the right path. Turn again, set your
 feet
 Upon the narrow way, marked by Jesus' martyr blood.

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Simple Living: A Lost Art?

■ By Robert Martens

[M]y father, Lyman, was born in 1929. He grew up in the small town of Berlin, in a two-bedroom, one-bath home with modern conveniences like an indoor toilet, hot and cold running water, a kerosene cooking stove, and a radio. However, they didn't have a refrigerator or a telephone or electric lights, all of which were expensive luxuries.... I was born in Berlin in a ranch house that had been built a few years earlier. We still grew most of our vegetables from two large gardens in our backyard and raised a cow in the field beyond them.... My son was born in 2004 in California. Before his first birthday, he logged four flights and had a frequent flyer number with Southwest Airlines. Before graduating high school, he had traveled to ten different countries. (Augustine & Hostetler 126-127).

A fundamental principle of the early Anabaptists was to live simply, to reject the pomp and circumstance of the Roman Catholic Church. Menno Simons wrote, "We are prepared with all our hearts to share our possessions, gold, and all that we have, however little it may be; to sweat and labour to meet the needs of the poor, as the Spirit and Word of the Lord and true brotherly love imply" (qtd. in Braun pt. 1, 2). Years later, this idea had not been forgotten. The Mennonite Confession of Faith states, "As stewards of money and possessions, we are to live simply.... We cannot be true servants of God and let our lives be ruled by desire for wealth.... Our tradition of simple living is

rooted not in frugality for its own sake, but in dependence on God...” (qtd. in Braun pt. 1, 3). And César García, general secretary of the Mennonite World Conference, points out that Scripture passages such as Luke 11:3 advise living only with what is necessary: “Give us each day our daily bread.” García goes on to write that our “voracious appetite” is a major determinant of the climate crisis (García 2).

And yet, Will Braun, current editor of the *Canadian Mennonite*, writes that it now seems odd to talk about simple living. As Sheri Hostetler points out in the passage above, the transformation from a rudimentary existence to a jet-setting lifestyle happened over a few generations, so rapidly that it’s barely noticeable until someone takes a breath, looks back, and asks, “What happened?” Many North American Mennonites are firmly entrenched in an affluent way of life; does their remarkable generosity compensate for that?

In the Mennonite Brethren journal *Direction*, Ken Friesen, teacher at Fresno Pacific College, makes the charge that we have become infected with the “affluenza virus.” Historically, he writes, Anabaptists called their fellow-believers to live “in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, unconcerned about worldly possessions and trusting in God to clothe and feed them” (1). The state considered this to be as much a threat as the principle of non-violence. Then, he writes, persecution made a necessity of virtue. Rather than following a path to prosperity, Anabaptists were forced to live on the margins, sometimes living hand-to-mouth. Mennonites calmly adopted the idea of simply living—with exceptions, of course—in the Lowlands, Poland, and Russia. The idea of simplicity also became, perhaps with frequency, a virtue of self-righteousness: “I live plainer than you do.” But the notion itself persisted.

However, in North America, Friesen declares, “economic simplicity” eventually frayed as Mennonites



Built around 1600, “The Hidden Church.” Mennonite church in Pingjum was constructed to look like an ordinary house.

Photo credit: Julia M. Toews, 2008.

assimilated to modern culture. He feels that a brief pause took hold in the 1970s: in the United States, Christian communities such as Reba Place, the Sojourners Community, and Koinonia Farm sprouted up amidst a sea of “affluenza.” In 1976, Doris Janzen Longacre published her *More-with-Less Cookbook*, which was as much a call to simple living as a cookbook. It has sold as many

as 800,000 copies. Gayle Gerber Koonz, professor at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, remarked that “If you consider the theological teaching and witness of this cookbook, its impact far outweighs that of most Mennonite writings in theology and ethics” (qtd. in Fish 22).

Yet the pause was only that, contends Friesen. Other Anabaptist-Mennonite distinctives have endured, he writes, but that of simple living has been nearly completely abandoned. “Affluenza,” he argues, has resulted in climate change, the explosion in use of plastics, and mountains of electronic waste. Will Braun disagrees in part: “[S]implicity still has something of a foothold in our collective soul” (pt. 2, 5).

A leading environmentalist once commented—and governments don’t like to hear this, he said—that we must start living like our grandparents. In the *Canadian Mennonite*, Zach Rempel maintains that endless economic growth is destructive and ultimately impossible. Controversially, he argues for “degrowth.” But is that a practical ideal? Even environmentalists, he says, have ceased talking about simple living.

Will Braun maintains that it is possible to take basic action on living more simply. He interviewed some participants in a Steinbach group of women who met occasionally to discuss simpler living. Some of the “practical life changes” that they suggested were “buying local as much as possible even when it costs more; reduced purchase of plastics; fewer clothes; walking more often;

planting more trees; letting go of the habit of buying a new piece of clothing on every trip to Costco and generally just buying less” (pt. 2, 4).

Doris Janzen Longacre wrote, “There is no fast, easy way ... but one voice still speaks in the silence. For Christians it is the call to obedience” (qtd. in Fish 22). Danielle Klotz, director of *Anabaptist World*, defines a simple lifestyle as both an act and an inner relationship with the divine. “The more I reflected on simplicity as a spiritual practice, the more I realized I was not overtly taught about it. I don’t recall a conversation about how simple living is an expression of following Jesus. It was just our way of doing things.... Living simply, as I understand it in our Anabaptist tradition, arises from a desire to be in a closer relationship with God. It helps to avoid distractions from following God’s call” (2).

Tangled issues, of faith, action, and culture. “Simple” isn’t simple at all.

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The Fernheim Archive: Preserving Our History

■ By Caroline Dueck de Klassen, Archiv Fernheim

Caroline works at the Fernheim Archive in Paraguay. She has graciously written a brief history on the Archive for Roots and Branches.

The groundwork for the Fernheim Archive was laid by Peter P. Klassen, a teacher, historian, and author of numerous books about the Paraguayan Mennonites. In 1969, he began systematically organizing historical documents at the colony office. Ewald Reimer briefly continued this work in 1977. As the colony prepared for its fiftieth anniversary, which was celebrated in 1980, an official archive was established, with Ingrid Epp overseeing its development for the next thirteen years. After that, and until February 2023, theologian and historian Gundolf Niebuhr played a significant role, initiating scanning and digitization efforts in the archive.

The archive, as well as the museum, is administratively linked to the Department of Education and Culture within the Colony. The collection grew to meet various historical documentation needs and includes minutes (protocols), correspondence, research studies, and historical writings, as well as photographs, diaries, journals, audio and visual materials and other significant items. The archive’s work focuses on two key areas: gathering materials; and making these resources available and



Caroline chatting with Marvin Rempel during her visit to MHSBC.

Photo credit: MHSBC files.

accessible to writers, teachers, students, researchers, journalists and others.

In recent years we have seen an increased interest in the archive’s resources; we have supported multiple book projects, and provided material for different projects,

such as photobooks or film projects. We are pleased to continue to offer our historical resources and services to Colony members and the wider community.

Many historical initiatives in the Colony gain momentum around major anniversaries. This past year, we marked ninety years since the opening of the *Koloniehaus*, Filadelfia's original administration building. We organized a gathering with the present administrative members and enjoyed an open house afterwards. Our department also hosted an Archive Day, where visitors enjoyed a photo exhibit on the early pioneering years, explored old issues of the *Mennoblatt*, participated in genealogy sessions, and engaged with interactive games highlighting key Colony events, people, and places.

With limited space becoming a challenge, we sought alternative storage solutions and, in 2022, were able to expand the archive's facilities. Many materials are currently being reviewed, re-cataloged, and reorganized. Our extensive collection of over 20,000 photos, in particular, requires careful classification, digitization and indexing. Additional file cabinets were acquired, and they fill up remarkably quickly.

Also in 2023, we established two new departments within our office: Audiovisual and Genealogy. The colony's rich collection of film and audio materials is now being systematically indexed by a competent colleague, making these resources more accessible. And more and more people are taking advantage of our help in researching their family tree.

In September 2024, I had the privilege of visiting various Mennonite archives, museums, and historical



Koloniehaus, now a museum, in Filadelfia, Paraguay.

Photo credit: Ron Toews, 2009.

societies in Manitoba and British Columbia. The opportunity to exchange experiences was invaluable, and I gained deeper insights into resources such as the MAID (Mennonite Archival Information Database) program and the G^RanDMA (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry) database, both of which I frequently use.

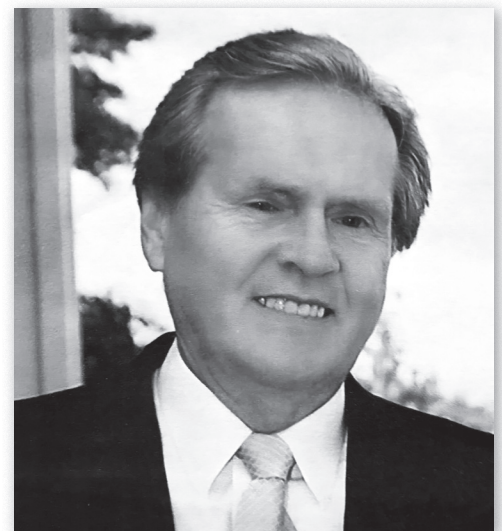
This visit not only enhanced my understanding of archival practices but also highlighted the vast network of shared heritage to which we belong. Learning from the dedicated archivists and volunteers in Manitoba and BC has strengthened my commitment to preserving Fernheim history and making it more accessible. I am deeply grateful to all those who generously shared their knowledge and inspired me to learn more about worldwide Mennonite history. Above all, my aim is to ensure that our collective stories endure and to encourage those who wish to explore them.

The Rempel Brothers

■ By David F. Loewen

During the 1970s and 1980s, British Columbia's construction industry was marked by some of the most turbulent labour unrest in Canada. Open-shop contractors had been excluded, under provincial legislation, from bidding on government contracts. That inequity would be corrected, thanks in large part to the involvement of Ewald and Ed Rempel.

Dietrich and Margaret (Fast) Rempel, along with their two sons, George and Ewald, emigrated from Russia to Canada in 1926. They settled briefly in Manitou, Manitoba, where two more children joined their family. In 1934, the Rempel family moved to Abbotsford. Four more children joined the family in BC, including Edward, their sixth child. Here they were engaged in berry farming.



Ed Rempel.

Photo source: Obituary, *Abbotsford News*, 2018.

Ewald attended Huntingdon Elementary School and Philip Sheffield High School in Abbotsford. He did not finish his formal education, deciding in favour of joining his parents in their berry farming endeavour. Ed was born in Abbotsford and attended Philip Sheffield High School. Following marriage in 1957, he moved to Fort St. John, where he became involved in the oil and gas business.

Not long after joining his parents on the berry farm, Ewald launched into the gravel trucking business, and in 1964, was invited to join brother Clarence in his newly established concrete business. Three years later, Edward joined the two brothers in forming Rempel Bros. Concrete. Sadly, Clarence's involvement was short-lived, as he died of a heart attack in 1975.

Over the next twenty-one years, the company grew rapidly. Rempel Bros. Concrete initiated several innovations that provided the company with an economic advantage. The company pioneered the "tandem-tandem" concrete mixers in Canada, which provided trucks with the largest legal carrying capacity in Western Canada (they were already used south of the border), and was one of the first in western Canada to implement computerized concrete batching. Rempel Concrete was positioned to take advantage of the construction boom on the horizon. (The term "tandem" refers to the truck having two sets of drive axles, one behind the other, which provides better traction, stability, and the ability to carry heavier loads compared to single-axle dump trucks. [*Boom & Bucket*])

Of approximately 100,000 certified tradespeople in the province in the 1970s, roughly two-thirds were non-unionized (Sorenson). Construction of a school in Trail, BC, was the event that galvanized independent businesses across the province into forming the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association (ICBA), after open-shop contractors had been disallowed from bidding on the project. Its appeal in rural BC was pronounced.

Not long after, open-shop contractor Kerkhoff Construction of Chilliwack won the bid to build the Kamloops courthouse, but was unable to secure concrete when local unionized truck drivers refused to deliver concrete to the building site. Kerkhof turned to Rempel Bros. Concrete, which sent trucks and drivers to deliver locally sourced concrete. Similar actions were repeated many more times across the Lower Mainland



Ewald & Ethel Rempel.

Photo source: Abbotsford Community Foundation, "Ewald Rempel's Legacy Story."

and Fraser Valley. As a result, Rempel Bros. Concrete became key to the growth of open-shop construction in BC, as it supplied open-shop builders with cement, a fact to which many builders and developers will attest today, both small and large. Several times, unions tried to organize Rempel Bros. Concrete, but the family had built a loyal and well-cared-for employee group, and every effort failed.

At one point, Rempel Bros. Concrete was the largest open-shop concrete company in the province, thanks to the Rempels' persistence in bidding, advocacy for open shop, and belief in treating their employees fairly. Ed Rempel's role in advocating for independent contractors resulted in harassment and it tested some personal relationships. The tension in the mid-1970s was pronounced while Ewald, Ed, and Myrtle-Anne Rempel played roles in helping ICBA become established.

A False Creek condo development in Vancouver became the flashpoint of the tension between unions and independent contractors, with as many as one thousand picketers on site. Ultimately, court intervention brought a tentative peace to the construction scene—until Expo '86.

When the bidding on the Expo site construction began, unionized and open-shop contractors resumed the "battle." Premier Bennett threatened to cancel Expo if the two sectors could not agree. During the pivotal

negotiations over who would build the Expo '86 projects—open-shop or building trades unions—Ed Rempel played a key role. It was so controversial and heated at the time that when Ed met with Expo boss, Jimmy Pattison, he was asked to get off the elevator two floors below and then take the stairs. ICBA, prompted by people like Ed Rempel, assured Pattison that they could build Expo. A resolution was reached which marked the first time in BC history that unionized and open-shop companies worked together amicably on a site. As a footnote to this story, Ewald Rempel and Jimmy Pattison developed a personal friendship. Ewald and Ethel Rempel were invited as guests to the dinner honouring Prince Charles and Princess Diana at the opening of Expo '86.

Today, those with knowledge of ICBA's history will tell you that Ed and Ewald Rempel championed the right of all trades people to participate in the building of this province, regardless of union status. Today, the open-shop sector constitutes 85 percent of the construction industry in BC (Sorenson). And yet, recent provincial legislation continues to exclude open-shop contractors from bidding on significant government infrastructure projects.

At its peak, Rempel Bros. Concrete had a fleet of eighty-eight mixer trucks and eight plants throughout the Valley and Lower Mainland. In addition, it had portable operations at Tumbler Ridge, Trail, Port Hardy, and Hedley, with over 250 employees. The company had diversified to include steel, piledriving, concrete products supplies, and sand and gravel. In 1988, Rempel Bros. Concrete was sold; some of the other companies were retained.

Beyond business, both brothers were deeply invested in their church and community. Ewald (1926-1993) served on the board of Habitat for Humanity and contributed his organizational abilities to the construction of the Fraser Valley Child Development Centre (then referred to as the "Lego building"). He is described by

many as a role model for younger entrepreneurs, for whom he often generously provided start-up loans. He served on the board of the Church of the Nazarene for most of fifty years, and on both of its finance and building committees. In addition, he served on the Regional Conference finance committee and generously donated to the national missions board for overseas work. He taught adult Sunday school and sang in the church choir. Ewald is remembered for his fierce loyalty, natural generosity, and gentle spirit.

Ed (1936-2018) served numerous organizations, which include: BC Institute of Technology (BCIT) board of governors; Matsqui-Abbotsford Police Association board of governors; Amalgamated Construction Association of Canada, president; BC Concrete Association, president; Independent Contractors and Businesses Association (ICBA), president and co-founder; Economic Development Advisory Committee for the City of Abbotsford, member; BC Tax Assessment Board, member; United Way, board member; Youth for Christ organization, board member; Robert Schuller Ministries, board member; Sevenoaks Alliance Church finance committee, member. Ed was passionate about his family and enjoyed outdoor activities. He sang in the Sevenoaks Alliance Church choir for many years. He and Myrtle-Anne were both involved with Campus Crusade (now known as Cru). Ed was a visionary with a deep spiritual faith, whose motto was "Always take the high road."

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Sour Cherry Platz, Mennonites and Türkiye

■ By Gladys Loewen

To welcome our new Turkish neighbours in Vancouver, I brought sour cherry platz to a gathering of the residents of our floor. Didem and Arda immediately recognized the taste of sour cherries, were surprised that we had them in Canada, and asked where

they could find them. I explained that my Mennonite grandparents, refugees from Ukraine, Russia and Siberia, had sour cherry trees and used the fruit for baking *platz* and *perishky*. With Türkiye so close to Ukraine, Didem wondered if there were Mennonites in Türkiye.

She called her father who grew up in Kars in the

northeastern corner of Türkiye who recalled knowing some Mennonites who were originally from Ukraine and South Russia. They raised cows, pigs, vegetables, fruit, and wheat, and sold meat, milk, cheese, and produce. He sent her a book titled *Annem Sara Ve Malakanlar* (My Mother Sara and the Malakans) by Vedat Akçayöz. I paged through the book looking for the word “Menonit” and only recognized the word “Doukhobor,” which was prevalent. The question at hand: Did Mennonites live in Turkey?

To be clear, I could not read the Akçayöz book as I do not read Turkish, so the book itself may contain more information. However, I did find several maps that had a few Mennonite or German villages identified: Gnadenfeld, Al'tenau, and Alexandrovka from 1820-1845.

“Malakanlar” (Malakans) is commonly used to describe some of the non-native religious groups from Russia who did not follow the Russian Orthodox Church beliefs. Mennonites are included in this term. The term “Molokanlar” (Molokan) usually refers to a specific Christian sect that was known as “dairy eaters.” They drank milk during Lent which was prohibited by the Russian Orthodox Church. The Doukhobors were a group that broke away from the Molokans, citing differences in their beliefs. Both Malakans and Molokans were known as “Spiritual Christians.” The use of the terms Malakanlar and Molokanlar has not been consistent, making research challenging.

Delving into the history of Spiritual Christians, I found that Russia pressured them to leave the country in the early 1800s due to their religious beliefs and offered them land in the Molochnaya River Valley in



The map of villages in Kars Province, Russia, 1879-1899, includes familiar names for Mennonite colonies like Petrovka, Alexandrovka, Novo Petrovka.

southern Ukraine, northeast of Crimea. This area was sparsely inhabited so there was space for different groups to have their own territory.

Doukhobors were given land on the west side of the Molochna River, with Anabaptists (Mennonites) on the east side and other Spiritual Christians from Germany settling south of the Anabaptists, i.e., Lutherans and Catholics (Kalmakoff 2024). There is evidence that Mennonites and Doukhobors often lived side by side, helping each other in Ukraine (Buchnaya; Isaac). (See Fig 1: Doukhobor, Mennonite and other Spiritual Christian villages in Russia 1802-1835. Akçayöz, p. 42.)

A probe into the history of Kars Province provided a possible clue as to why Mennonites might have lived in Türkiye. Kars became part of the Ottoman Empire in 1514 and was taken over by Russia in 1828. It was officially annexed by Russia during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878. After the war, Russia, still bothered that Spiritual Christians did not follow the Russian Orthodox religion, offered additional land to them in Kars province (Molokane.org). Between 1879 to 1886, reports indicate that two thousand Doukhobors from Ukraine settled in two districts of Kars Province (Kalmakoff, *Republic of Turkey*). Some Mennonites may have settled in Kars along with the Doukhobors when Russia offered land there.

In 1886, the Russian composition of the ethnic population of Kars Oblast was slightly over 6% with 0.15%



Villages in Kars Province, Russia, 1879-1899. Doukhor and other Molokan Spiritual Christian sects. J. Kalmakoff.

speaking German (Wikipedia), a very small percentage of the population.

After ninety years of claiming Kars Province, Russia ceded it back to Türkiye in 1918. When Russia handed Kars Province back to Türkiye, all Spiritual Christians living there—Doukhobors, Mennonites, Lutherans, etc.—would have suddenly lived in Türkiye, not Russia.

Besides these maps, I have found no other information to verify that Mennonites ever moved to the Kars Province in Türkiye other than Didem's father. They might have assimilated at some point and lived comfortably surrounded by the many Doukhobor villages in Kars Province. Didem says there a story in the book about a Malakan family and she feels that it is about a Mennonite family. The fact that Malakanlar pertains to several Spiritual Christian groups, not just Mennonites, makes it difficult to ascertain if this family is of Mennonite descent. Another possibility is that Mennonites may have travelled through Türkiye as they escaped the USSR during the Bolshevik Revolution, living there for a short period of time.

It would be interesting if anyone knows of Mennonites who might have lived in Türkiye, as it

would be useful to the Historical Society to learn more about this possibility. One cannot underestimate the power of sour cherry platz as it led to this stimulating question and research.

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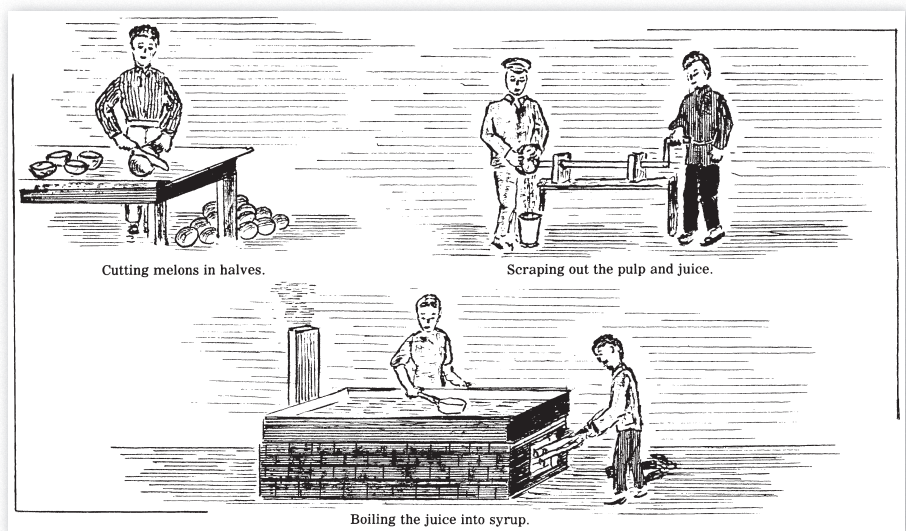
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Watermelon Syrup

■ By Maryann Tjart Jantzen

In August 2002, when my son and I were in Moscow during a heat-wave, our taxi passed huge bins of watermelons by the side of the road. I wanted a refreshing slice right that minute! Remembering this moment, I was reminded of my mother's comments about the watermelon syrup the Mennonites in South Russia would make. While I've often enjoyed chowing down on cold watermelon on a hot day and have tried (mostly unsuccessfully) to grow watermelons in the temperate Fraser Valley, I've never encountered homemade watermelon syrup (nor have I developed a taste for watermelon pickles, something my mother regularly made).

Although watermelon syrup is not something many of us might associate with a Russian Mennonite culinary heritage, a quick internet search suggests it is still



Making watermelon syrup.

Image source: The Molotschna Colony by Henry B. Thiessen. 1979, p. 46.

popular in Central and Eastern Europe, and especially in Russia. The *American Historical Society of Germans from Russia* Facebook page even provides contemporary instructions for making Watermelon Honey (watermelon syrup).

According to Kansas-born Norma Jost Voth, in her *Mennonite Foods and Folkways from Russia*, watermelon syrup was a staple in many Russian Mennonite homes

(423-425). In summer, watermelons were plentiful and inexpensive, and syrup-making became a communal event. She writes that some of the Mennonites who moved in the 1870s to Kansas and to other long-growing season areas in the USA kept up this tradition. She records women's memories of syrup-making:

Anne Defehr Dueck: "The watermelon syrup cooked all night. It was a fine time to socialize."
Helene Rempel: "For a whole week we cooked syrup outside. Thirteen buckets of juice equaled one bucket of syrup."

In her article, "Vegetable Gardens," Tracy Ruta Fuchs writes that "Mennonites learned of *Arbüz* (watermelons) from the Ukrainians when they came to South Russia in the late 1700s.... They were often grown in great numbers, planted in the *Baschtan* or melon field where they had lots of room to grow. They may also have been planted right in the vegetable garden or in a separate patch beside it." She quotes the writing on watermelons of Mennonite farmer John W. Dueck, from Friedensfeld, South Russia: "There were loads, we could eat as much as we wanted until Christmas. Should there be one among them not quite ripe enough, we would feed it to the hogs. At the time when watermelons were starting to ripen, one or two watchmen stood guard in case anyone should steal them.... One year we grew 500 watermelons! Eaten fresh, pickled, or made into watermelon syrup, as in Russia. Mom and Dad loved baking sweetened with the syrup" (14-18).

Fuchs emphasizes that "the watermelons used in Russia to make syrup were not like the ones currently found in grocery stores with bright pink insides, but were small, cream-coloured, and very sweet." This variety of watermelon was considered to be of exceptional quality and prized for making syrup, since its juice was especially sweet. The syrup was stored in "large barrels" and some was even sold "on the local market" (14).

Seeds for these melons were brought to Saskatchewan by Russian immigrants in the 1870s. On *bruderthaler.blogspot.com*, the writer mentions ordering seeds of these heritage melons from Seed Savers Exchange: "The true discovery for the ethnic *Russländer* in this catalogue though is the *Cream of Saskatchewan*—a true representative of the fabled white watermelons of Russian Mennonite lore. White watermelons (*Sockaarbus*) were essential for making *Süare Arbusen* (watermelon pickles)

WATERMELON HONEY

Arbusenhonig



Recipe and photo by Sam Brungardt

INGREDIENTS

2 large watermelons

EQUIPMENT

- Sharp knife and cutting board
- Blender or hand blender
- Large, heavy stainless steel or enamel pots
- Wooden spoon
- Half-pint canning jars and lids

For more recipes and information about Germans from Russia, visit ahsgr.org.



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Wash melons and cut them in half.
2. Scoop out the pulp and put it into a blender. Or, use a hand blender and push it into the melon half, using the melon half as your container.
3. Once blended, strain juice through a fine sieve into a large, heavy pot. Discard pulp and seeds.
4. Place pot on the burner and over medium-high heat, bring the juice to a boil. Keep simmering, skimming off the foam occasionally.
5. When the juice has reduced to about 3/4 of the original amount, remove from heat and strain. This will help it have a beautiful clear color and consistency.
6. Pour strained juice into a smaller heavy pot and continue reducing until it becomes a thick syrup. Be careful: the syrup has a tendency to "plop" as it thickens and it is **sticky** and **extremely** hot. The longer the syrup cooks, the browner it will get.
7. Pour boiling syrup into hot sterilized jars, filling to within 1/2" of the rims. Cover with sterilized lids and hand-tighten. Process in boiling water bath for 10 minutes. Remove and keep away from drafts.
8. Or, store unprocessed syrup in the fridge for up to one month.

American Historical Society of Germans from Russia
Facebook page

and for the essential Mennonite sweetener—white watermelon syrup: Does well in cool northern climates.... A rare treat with sweet white flesh, exceptional flavor. Pale green skin with dark stripes. Very thin rind, must be handled with care—strictly garden to table" (SSE 2011, Catalogue 68-6 qtd. in <https://bruderthaler.blogspot.com/2011/05/>). Interestingly, an annual event at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Swift Current is the Watermelon Festival, held every July, attracting visitors from across the province (<https://mennoniteheritagevillage.ca>).

Norma Voth Jost writes that the traditional process of making watermelon syrup was time-consuming: "The melons were cut in half and the pulp scraped from the rind with a scoop attached to a table and cranked by hand. One man turned the crank while another applied the melon to the scraper. Juice and seeds dripped into a pail below. The juice was strained and

boiled over a large outdoor fire-place until it became thick syrup. This might take several days or up to a week” (424).

She quotes Henry B. Thiessen as stating that “[t]he amber brown syrup was prized for its good flavor. Eaten for breakfast on rye bread, spread over pancakes or used as a sweetener in baking pepper-nuts and cookies.” In hard times, watermelon syrup was a valued replacement for sugar. Mia Reimer Defehr reported that “during the famine of 1920-21 ... some of the farmers in the Kuban accepted aid from the American Mennonites. Most were able to survive by means of their cornmeal, watermelon syrup and sunflower oil.”

While most Mennonites these days don’t seem to be engaged in watermelon syrup-making, many of us still thoroughly enjoy our summer watermelon feasts (especially if *Rollkuchen* are also served), particularly on blistering hot days.



“Cream of Saskatchewan Watermelon”

Seed Savers Exchange,
2011: bruderthaler.blogspot.com

Watermelon syrup is available online from various sources, for about 18 dollars (CAD) for 700 millilitres. The Dankoff company (<https://www.dankoff.com>) promotes it as a “top-seller in central and eastern Europe, particularly in Russia where watermelon is widely consumed,” claiming their “MONIN Watermelon syrup delivers the exotic, fresh, thirst-quenching taste of this ultimate summer fruit.”

I’m tempted to buy some but don’t plan to start making my own anytime soon. Times have changed.

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FROM THE DAILY BONNET (NOW THE UNGER REPORT)

Liberal Mennonite Church Approves the Use of Seedless Watermelons

■ Andrew Unger & Thirst, August 2, 2017

ALTONA, MB ■ Altona’s most progressive Mennonite church, the EAMBCM, is causing waves this week after the elder board voted to approve the consumption of seedless watermelons at church picnics.

“I knew that church was full of backsliders,” said rival Mennonite pastor Rev. Brandt, “but never in all my years did I think they’d sink this low.”

EAMBCM has created controversy in the past by appointing three women to the elder board and by allowing the young people to listen to music with drums in it, but never have they been so alienated from the rest of the community as after their recent seedless watermelon decision.

“For centuries Mennonites have remained committed



to the seeded watermelon,” said Brandt. “But those EAMBCMs are always up to something. It really so sad to see them stray so far from the gospel.”

Some have argued that the seedless watermelons are more convenient to eat and are less of a choking hazard, but most Altona residents are not willing to make the switch.

“As for me and my house, we will eat the seeded watermelon,” said Brandt. “And some tasty *roll kuchen* to boot.”

Celebrating A Ministry Unique in All of Canada

■ By David Giesbrecht

Clearbrook MB—a mission-minded church

All births are fragile. So it was with the beginning of the Clearbrook MB Church on 17 October 1935. The village of Clearbrook was in its infancy, and owing to its setting, was known as Poverty Flats. However, neither internal nor external threats could diminish the commitment of this church to be a ministry centre. Congratulating the church on its seventy-fifth anniversary in October 2011, the moderator of the Canadian MB Conference had this to say, “From the humble beginning in 1936, Clearbrook MB has been and continues to be a strong witness for the Kingdom of God in this area, and indeed, around the world.”

The vision for a new ministry is born

It is therefore in faithful keeping with its spiritual heritage that, during the mid 1990s, church leaders began investigating the possibility of a local television broadcasting ministry. What could be more natural, given the number of seniors living in close proximity to the church, occupying sprawling apartment complexes and several seniors homes? A broadcast ministry was all the more urgent, given that close to twenty percent of residents in Abbotsford are seniors (2023), including many with mobility limitations.

Implementing the vision

Church Council minutes show that, beginning in late 1997, discussion of a television ministry was on its agenda, and continued so for most meetings over the next decade. On November 17, 1997 Pastor George Baier reported that the Council approved applying to the Canadian Radio-television & Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) “for permission to transmit a TV signal” with an initial cost of \$4,500.00.

Little did Council know how much work would be involved. With the appointment of Eldon DeFehr to pastoral staff on October 1, 1998, he assumed leadership of this enterprise. Clear “TV Ministry Guidelines” needed to be developed. Equipment that satisfied



Clearbrook MB Church, Abbotsford, BC.

Photo credit: Julia M. Toews.

technical and CRTC requirements required careful decision-making. To oversee the operation of the audio/video and broadcast equipment, Werner Schmidt was hired in October 1997. A TV Committee was established that over time included Larry Locken, Kevin Klassen and Fred Eckert.

It was with a rich sense of a promising venture that Eldon DeFehr reported to Council on June 12, 2000 that “Industry Canada has granted official permission” to begin broadcasting television programs. However, the licence set out defined limits. The Clearbrook MB Church would be legally and financially responsible “for all aspects of operating Station CFEG.” The content of all programming “must be religious in nature” and be mostly locally produced. Including programming in German matched the government’s emphasis on multiculturalism. Forbidden was any commercial advertising or syndicated content. And of concern for the CRTC was that signal strength not exceed fifty watts radiating power.

One more critical matter needed to be settled. Since the CRTC grants television broadcasting licences only to societies, the BC MB Conference agreed to be the legal licence holder for this ministry.

Establishing a broadcasting profile

From the outset, the TV Ministry Committee “sought the Lord’s direction” in establishing a strong foundation. On July 12, 1999, Eldon DeFehr tabled a vision statement to Council defining ministry objectives. All programs should be “biblically sound and God honouring.”

This submission also projected intended audiences, program goals and specific ministry guidelines. Council agreed to a start-up budget of \$38,000, and to specific staffing responsibilities. Broadcast transmission would begin December 1999.

In retrospect, the vision for a television broadcasting ministry has been an astounding success. It was Pastor Peter Klassen who suggested the call letters for Station CFEG, by which he meant “Christ’s Followers Extending Grace.” CFEG now broadcasts twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, including all Sunday worship services, hymn sing events, Bible studies and funeral services.

Logging the journey

Managing a television ministry is a never-ending labour of love that involves community partnerships. In order to expand broadcast reach, the board of Garden Park Tower (near the church) approved the installation of an antenna on the top of their building. Similarly, Shaw Cable authorized “injecting our broadcast signal in their cable networks.” Administratively, the City of Abbotsford and the CRTC had to approve all developments along the way.

Another major innovation required by the CRTC in 2020 was the transition from analog to digital signal broadcasting, resulting in increased signal strength to 485 watts radiating power. This in turn required the church to replace most of its broadcast equipment. Notably, these upgrades have significantly increased the range and picture quality of the broadcasts.

Response of viewers

From the outset, Council minutes reflect many favourable expressions from viewers, so much so that at times



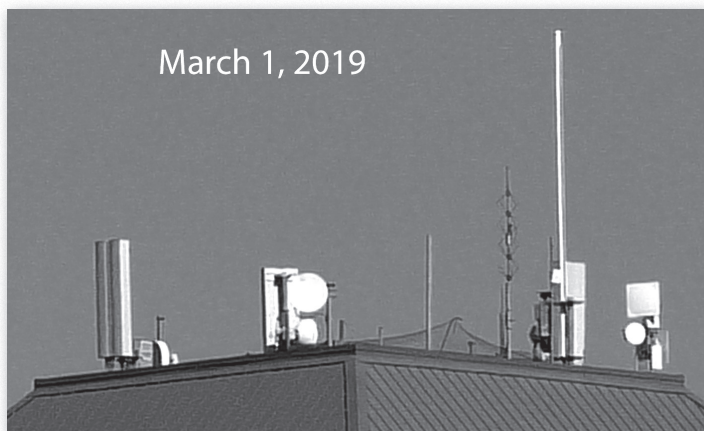
Werner Schroeder - Broadcast Production/Media Technician.

Photo source: Clearbrook MB Church.

it was difficult to keep up with requests for hook-ups. A May 2023 email to the church put it this way: “I am a resident of Menno Place and have been watching the Clearbrook Sunday service on our TV channel here for some time. I just wanted to tell you how greatly I appreciate [Pastor Don’s] messages each Sunday, and the music. I am actually a Pentecostal but now I call myself an ‘armchair Mennonite.’”

Acknowledging a rich blessing

The Clearbrook MB Church can lay claim to a rich institutional memory. Eldon DeFehr and those with whom he worked deserve very large commendation for investing a quarter-century of time and effort in this ministry. During much of this time, Werner Schroeder has faithfully provided technical assistance. His wife, Betty, has contributed scenic pictures and special Scripture texts to enhance broadcast richness, which has been much appreciated by many viewers. Kevin Klassen has devoted years of dedicated service in assembling audio feeds for the broadcasts and technical assistance to viewers.



Original antennas.

Photo source: Clearbrook MB Church.

“Week after week the Word of God reaches out to unknown hundreds of people.... Only eternity will reveal the full impact of this outreach” (2015 Annual Church Report). Most of all, this report acknowledges the grace and goodness of God in sustaining this ministry. Clearbrook MB Church can rightfully claim a distinction. It is the only church in Canada that has ever received a television broadcasting licence. To our government be thanks, and to our God be the glory.

Peter Wiebe, as told to his daughter, Diana Cruchley. *how hard can it be? Peter Wiebe—1915–2010*. Victoria, BC: Printorium Bookworks, 2017.

■ By Robert Martens

Any version of a life-story is problematic. Memoirs can be self-serving. Biographies may be tainted by the biases of the writer. A partial solution to these difficulties might be the oral history, in which the subject speaks in their own words to a knowledgeable interviewer. American historian Studs Terkel popularized the concept of oral histories with books such as *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*, published in 1970. Canadian Barry Broadfoot treated the same topic, quite brilliantly, with his oral history *Ten Lost Years* (1973).

It's a refreshing trend to read (or see on video) speakers saying what they want, how they want, mistakes and all. Grammatical errors, for example, or awkward phrasing due to unfamiliarity with a new language, are not edited out. The result is a feeling of genuineness, of presence. A recent life-story of Peter Wiebe, transcribed by his daughter Diana Cruchley, follows this trend to a fault: the book consists entirely of Wiebe speaking his mind. Though this possibly leaves a gap or two in the life-story, it's an interesting approach. The subsequent excerpts might convey some idea of how well this works. Peter Wiebe grew up in Saskatchewan, and later moved to British Columbia where he worked and raised a family.

We also used dried manure to heat the house. The manure from the cows was piled up. In the summer you mixed it with straw using farm machinery. You spread it about eight inches thick and let it dry in the sun. Then you cut it into squares and piled it up so the air could circulate around it and dry it more. In the winter you used it to start the fire. If it wasn't very cold you could use it in the cooking stove, which also heated the house.

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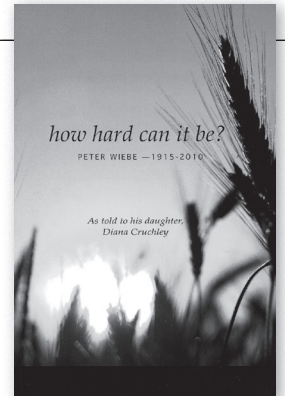
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It wasn't heavy or messy and it would burn like coal (57).

There came a time when the government said that we had to go to the English school. My father was forced to send me when I was about fourteen. Most of the Mennonite children were a laughingstock in English school because we couldn't speak any English. The teacher was Mennonite Brethren and could speak English, German and *platt deutsch*. *Platt deutsch* was something like Low German but had a mix of the languages and words that the Mennonites had picked up in their travels (85).

People started talking about the possibility of war, but I couldn't figure out the politics. I wasn't even aware of Poland and Czechoslovakia as countries although it was so far away that it wouldn't have mattered to me. We were very busy trying to make ends meet (107).

I worked a full shift at BC Packers and then also worked as a pipe fitter and welder at Ballard's Dog Food for about six hours per day, after my other shift. Eventually the manager phoned me and said that they would prefer that I not work at another job, and I was, in a way, glad not to work there any more because I didn't like how they did their slaughtering. I didn't think it was humane, and I had been involved in killing animals when I worked on farms. BC Packers was unionized and frequently the workers were laid off at the Christmas season because there were no fish at that time of the year (127-8).



Reg Reimer. *On The Cruel Edges of the World: A memoir of carrying help and hope into dark places in dangerous times*. Self-published: 2024. 342 pp.

■ Reviewed by David Giesbrecht

It is a fair comment that no memoir is complete, not completely free of biases. That conceded, *On the Cruel Edges of the World* is a deserving publication, inviting readers to peer into some of the darkest places the past century has cast up. And to see how one intrepid traveller negotiated his passage.

Notably, this account follows the author's inner journey from a bucolic little place called Greendale, British Columbia, to some global hot spots of war, terror and famine. And how that journey changed him from being a local follower of Jesus to a global disciple for whom spiritual and moral categories of "who's in and who's out" could no longer be confined within small containers. Beyond interesting personal details, this account includes some shrewd analysis of the social environment in which the account is set.

Reg and Donna Reimer began their missionary work in Vietnam in 1966. Little did they know that the infamous Tet Offensive, a mere two years later, would make their much-anticipated missionary future, let alone their very survival, perilous. Reg's painful beginnings did not deter him from becoming fluent in both spoken and written Vietnamese.

His reflections on Christian and Missionary Alliance Church missionary expectations, tightly controlled by executives in New York, makes for some heads-up reading. And particularly so, when Reg "debriefs" his discomfort over sympathy for the American war, for which missionary colleagues expressed uncritical support. In retrospect, perhaps even more painful for Reg and Donna was the practice of sending their children to boarding schools. Poignantly, in this memoir, Reg asks forgiveness from his children for having done so.

The many physical dangers and tropical diseases the Reimer family faced never became a pretext to doubt their call to mission work. However, lived experiences sharpened his critique of missionary culture and American military brutality. For instance, he describes the disastrous consequences of spraying Agent Orange (defoliation of lush tropical forests to expose Viet Cong to bombing raids): grotesquely misshapen fetuses were being born for a long time afterwards.

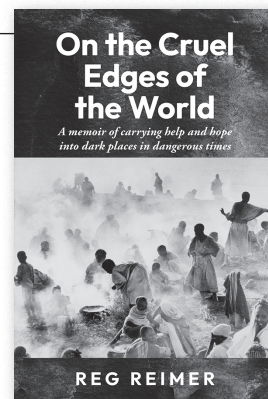
Much of this memoir documents the author's advocacy work on behalf of Communist-induced persecution of believers in Southeast Asia, for which work Reg became persona non grata in Vietnam. In his own words, the growth of the church in these parts has been explosive, and particularly so among brutalized tribal peoples. He writes that "Hmong men were often beaten hard enough to damage internal organs." Often Reg was brought to tears in his post-war interaction with local believers; this account is more fully documented in another publication, *Sorrow and Blood* (2012), which Reimer co-authored.

Somehow, tragedy on a grand scale was a magnet for Reg, as he became involved in healing and helping people during the tragic human-induced famine in Ethiopia in the mid 1980s, the aftermath of the 1990s civil war in Rwanda, or the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, all with historic human fatalities.

By any measure, Reg knows what captures an audience. In 1996 the World Evangelical Alliance convened at Central Heights Church in Abbotsford. Unforgettably, at one of the evenings, Reg introduced Kim Phuc, the "napalm girl," whose iconic photo was taken June 8, 1972 as she was running naked from a village consumed in flames. After Kim related some of her journey since then, the audience was treated to another surprise, when the Vietnamese pastor who introduced her to Christ fifteen years earlier was invited to the stage. The reunion of Kim and her pastor was electric.

The last several chapters touch on transcendent matters. Leaning heavily into John Stott and N. T. Wright, Reg wonders whether the biblical teaching on hell stipulates eternal or conditional punishment. And not surprisingly, Reg ponders over the final destiny of those who have never heard or understood the offer of Jesus.

Given so much of the despairing human condition that Reg has witnessed, he has not become a nihilist. Robustly he concludes, "The cross and the kingdom are irrevocably intertwined ... the suffering and cross-bearing of Jesus is also the way for his followers."



■ Reviewed by Robert Martens

Who was Melchior Rinck? Rinck is barely known even to scholars, and hence the question is asked early on in the latest publication by Stuart Murray, author of *The Naked Anabaptist* and director of Anabaptist Studies at Bristol Bible College. This obscure early reformer caught Murray's attention—enough so, that his research grew into a book. Rinck was one of the educated elite, attended the University of Leipzig and excelled in ancient Greek. Yet today, Rinck is only dimly known, partly because little was written by, or about, him. Moreover, he lived in Hesse, an area in central Germany, where Anabaptism faded from history after only a few years. He is also difficult to categorize, since he lived in a place situated between areas populated by Swiss and Dutch Anabaptists; he borrowed heavily from the Swiss but was very much his own man.

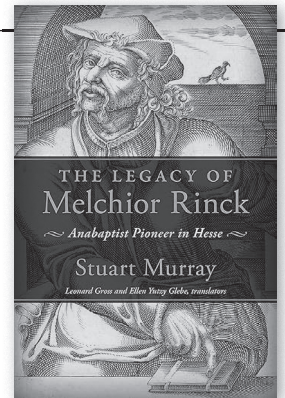
Melchior Rinck resided in one of the few areas of Europe where religious reformers were relatively tolerated. At the head of this Lutheran landgraviate was Philip I, sometimes called Philip the Magnanimous (*der Großmütige*), a staunch Lutheran who disagreed with Anabaptists but considered debate with them a better option than torture and execution. That he was a serial womanizer, and even bigamist, must have seemed less important to reformers than his comparative tolerance.

Philip, who ruled from 1519 to 1567, was on the throne when peasant unrest culminated in the Battle of Frankenhausen in 1525. The peasants' calls for reform had, until then, been mostly peaceful. When activists such as proto-Anabaptist Thomas Müntzer called for armed revolt, though, the battle quickly followed. "Battle" may be the wrong word. It was a massacre. About seven thousand peasants were slaughtered by state mercenaries, while casualties on the government side may have been as low as six. Melchior Rinck took active part in the revolt. He quickly renounced violence, however, and subsequently preached nonresistance while continuing his demands for reform.

Despite his violent past, Rinck was not executed by the state. As Murray points out, Rinck wisely disappeared from sight after the catastrophe of Frankenhausen, reemerging around 1527. Henceforth he

was a committed Anabaptist and travelling evangelist. At some point, he was apparently legally married to Anna von der Tann but the marriage appears to have been unconsummated. Rinck claimed that Anna's parents had delivered her into a marriage of convenience when he was still a peaceful Lutheran cleric; Anna's father became Melchior's inveterate enemy. Rinck's life became a whirlwind of arrest and release, banishment which he ignored, and interrogations by the state. His imprisonments seemed to have been relatively comfortable due to Philip's broadmindedness. Murray states that Rinck was always arrested by Philip's men—was that intentional on Rinck's part? Elsewhere, he may have ended up on the stake. Rinck's final years were spent in prison, where he died probably in the 1560s, though the exact date is unknown. He may have endured a few years in a dungeon but was eventually moved into better quarters by order of Philip. Though Rinck sometimes used extreme language, he seems to have been quite charming and did well in debate with interrogators—who frequently showed him respect.

Primary to Rinck's convictions, writes Murray, was his belief in a disciplined church community. Rinck considered that infant baptism, which drew all and anyone into the congregation, profligate or not, led directly to an immoral church. Infant baptism, he wrote, was "anti-baptism." It was—and here his extreme language, common for the time, slips in—"a banquet with the great whore, the Antichrist" (60). Jesus is not literally present in the bread and wine of the Lord's supper, he said; this belief signifies an "idol of bread" (109). More positively, Rinck preached the concept of *Gelassenheit*, of letting go, of living as though one owns nothing. He was a strong advocate of non-participation in war: "... if the Turk is indeed a persecutor of Christ (as it is claimed)," he wrote, "it is certainly by measure a minor evil deed in comparison to those who now call themselves Evangelical princes" (124). Nevertheless, he was no



anarchist. Rinck repeatedly affirmed the right of the state to punish evildoers and preserve order. He was committed to what Stuart Murray calls “subversive respect” (151).

And yet Anabaptism in Hesse quickly dwindled away. In sharp contrast to stories in *Martyrs Mirror*, Anabaptists in central Germany were quick to recant when arrested, reemerge as Anabaptists, recant again, and so forth. The movement in Hesse was more anti-corruption than pro-Anabaptist. Moreover, the highly respected Lutheran interrogator Martin Bucer engaged in debate with some of those arrested and was committed to reforming the Lutheran Church; this may have drawn some



Stuart Murray.
Photo source: Bristol Baptist College.

rebels back to the fold. Further, some Anabaptists moved away to the comparative safety of Moravia. There was also a lack of leadership and cohesion in Hesse, writes Murray, and Rinck himself was not a good organizer, preferring to travel, preach, and move on. Finally, Murray asks the question, was Philip’s tolerance a factor? Did this produce lukewarm Anabaptists? Was this more effective in stamping out rebel movements in the long run than confinement, torture and execution?

Roughly the final third of *The Legacy of Melchior Rinck* is devoted to documents of the time translated by

Leonard Gross and Ellen Yutzy Glebe. These will surely be useful to scholars.

LONDON FREE PRESS: NOV. 11, 2024

Landon Sim suspended five games for calling player “Mennonite”

■ Ryan Pyette

London Knights overage forward Landon Sim was suspended five games by the Ontario Hockey League on Monday for referring to an opposing player as a Mennonite.

The 20-year-old was ejected and assessed a game misconduct at the end of the first period of London’s 5-1 win at Sault Ste. Marie on Nov. 6. The OHL found Sim contravened the league’s code of conduct “intended to provoke an opposing player that was marginalizing on both religious and cultural grounds.”

“He used the word ‘Mennonite,’” Sim’s agent Andrew Maloney of Maloney and Thompson Sports Management said. “He was insulted by a player on the other team, just regular back-and-forth banter. Landon used the word toward him. I think it was just something he said without knowledge behind it.

“Obviously, it’s wrong and inappropriate. It’s a teachable moment and something he’s not going to repeat now that he’s totally aware of it.”



The league reinforced, in an emailed statement to *The Free Press*, that a player may not target another member of the OHL community in an attempt to provoke them on the basis of their religious or cultural background.

“All forms of harassment and abuse including, but not limited to, taunts and slurs and comments based on race, age, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, creed, gender, sexual orientation, marital status or disability will not be tolerated and are completely unacceptable under any circumstances,” the statement said.

“This is a violation of the league’s code of conduct and it carries with it a minimum suspension of five games,” OHL commissioner Bryan Crawford wrote.

Ernst Dyck: A *Plautdietscher** Artist

■ By Louise Bergen Price

*"Etj finj, daut beta aus hee tjeen Plautdietscha ewa ons
Lewe enn Russlaunt jemolt haft." (In my opinion, no
Plautdietscher has illustrated our life in Russia as well as
Ernst Dyck.) - Katharina Niefeld*

Ernst Dyck, oldest child of Kornelius and Katharina (Warkentin), was born 10 June 1937, just as Stalin's Terror was ramping up in Mennonite villages in the Ukrainian SSR. In 1942, his father was drafted into the *Trudarmee* (Russian labour army). Since his mother was now the family's only provider, Dyck and his younger siblings spent much of their childhood with their grandmother. Even at a young age, Dyck had the desire to become an artist. Tragedy struck his young life in 1952 when his father, a minister, was arrested and sent to prison, where he died. Dyck now had to help support his mother and five younger siblings. After completing grade 10, he studied hydrotechnique at the Frunze Polytechnic Institute in Kyrgyzstan, while also studying art by correspondence. In Kyrgyzstan, he met and married Maria Knelsen, and the couple had two children. Art had always been Dyck's passion, and by 1970, he was making his living as an artist in St. Petersburg (then Leningrad).

In 1976, Dyck managed to immigrate to Germany with his family, and settled in Neuwied; they were among the first Mennonite families to arrive there from the Soviet Union. Here he and Maria were baptized and became active in the life of the local Mennonite church. Eventually he got a job painting automobiles. His passion for art remained, though, and he spent his free time—weekends, after work, and often late into the night—painting and sketching. Friends helped him mount exhibitions in numerous galleries in places such as Ulm, Kassel, Bielefeld, Neuwied, Stuttgart and

Detmold, but to his disappointment, his family did not understand his passion for art, and the only works of art appreciated by his fellow Mennonites were his pencil sketches of life in the Soviet Union. Some of his sketches are featured in Horst Gerlach's book, *Bildband zur Geschichte der Mennoniten*, 1980. In his later years, Dyck turned more to painting pastoral scenes with flowers, trees and meadows.

A stroke in 2006 incapacitated him for a time, although he made a brief recovery and began painting



Country Scene. Painter: Ernst Dyck.

Image source: Naemi Fast

again. Ernst Dyck died suddenly in September 2007. His detailed sketches of life in Mennonite villages and his portrayal of the horrors of Stalin's Terror are available to use for educational purposes, and we are grateful to Naemi Fast of Germany for granting us permission to use them for our exhibit.

**Plautdietsch* - Low German. In German circles, the term *Plautdietscher* (Low German-speaker) is often used in place of *Russian Mennonite*.

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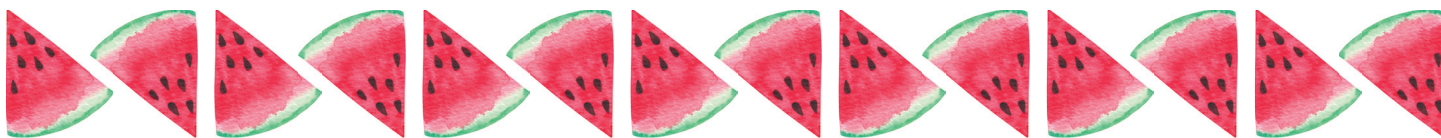
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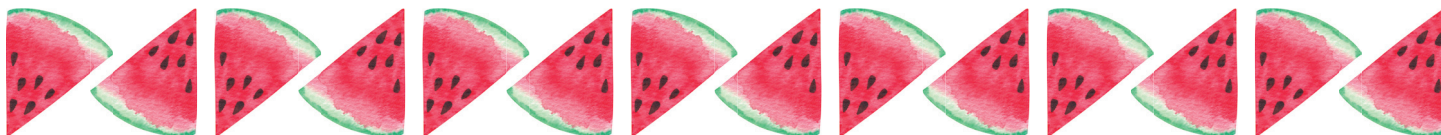
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Still Life with Watermelon. Artist: John Peters. Printed by permission.

John remembered watermelon as his favourite food in Nieder-Chortitza. Shortly after coming to Canada, he was so excited to find one in the store that he spent his mother's grocery money on one. His mother, Maria, made him take it back: every extra dollar went to paying off travel debt and there was no money for watermelon, [but] he has always loved it. Story told by John's daughter in law, Dorothy Peters.



Roots & Branches

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