

# Mennonite Historian

A PUBLICATION OF THE MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE and THE CENTRE FOR MB STUDIES IN CANADA



Miniature portraits by Balthasar Denner of his wife Esther Winter and himself.

## Balthasar Denner (1685-1749): Portrait Artist

by William Schroeder

Balthasar Denner was born on November 15, 1685, in Altona a village on the right bank of the Elbe River about two kilometers west of Hamburg. His father was Jacob Denner (1659-1746), a Mennonite<sup>1</sup> minister, and his mother was Catharina Wiebe (1663-1743). Balthasar was the oldest child and the only son in a family of seven. An accident at the age of eight left the boy with a permanent injury. He walked with a limp for the rest of his life. His convalescence was very slow and he was forced to sit still for long periods of time. To cope with his boredom the boy sketched pictures of the people and things around him. Soon he could copy other paintings with amazing accuracy. When Balthasar was eleven his parents made arrangements for their son to have formal art lessons.

His first teacher was a Dutch painter named Franz van Amama who taught him how to use watercolors. For a short time, while his father served as pastor in one of the Mennonite churches in Danzig, Balthasar received instruction there in the use of oil paints.

The Denner family moved back to Altona in 1701. Since their son had reached the age of sixteen they apprenticed him in a firm belonging to a rich uncle. Seeing that hard physical work was out of the question Balthasar was assigned to clerical duties. For the next six years he was busy writing letters, keeping records and balancing accounts. However, during his spare time he nurtured his artistic skills.

In 1707 at the age of twenty-two Balthasar Denner applied for and was

accepted in the Berlin Academy of Art. Favorable conditions in Berlin had attracted many foreign artists especially from Paris and Holland. Soon the school was considered to be one of the best in northern Europe.

While still in Berlin in 1709 Denner painted the first portraits for which he was paid. The subjects were Duke Christian August administrator of Holstein-Gottorp and his sister Maria Elizabeth abbess of Quindlinburg. The Duke was so pleased with his picture that he invited Denner to come to the Gottorp Castle near Schleswdg to paint more portraits for him. His main project was a large group portrait measuring 1.78 metres by 1.38 metres of twenty-one members of the Duke's court<sup>2</sup>. News of this painting spread from city to city and Denner's career as a portrait artist was launched. At no time in his life was he in need of commissions for court portraits. During the first few years of his career he maintained his art studio in his home in Altona and worked mostly in the Hamburg area, but as his fame spread lucrative contracts enticed him to leave the comforts of his home and temporarily relocate in distant cities in northern Europe.

Peter the Great had defeated the Swedish forces at Poltava in 1709 and gradually pushed them back onto their former territory. Early in 1716 the Czar decided to visit some of the cities in northern Europe. He quartered his army in Denmark and in Mecklenburg and then set out to visit Copenhagen, Berlin, Hamburg, Paris and Amsterdam. Wherever he went he gave and received or demanded lavish gifts. On his journey through Schleswig-Holstein he stayed in the Gottorp Castle where he saw Denner's magnificent group portrait. Peter liked the painting and insisted on taking the masterpiece to Petersburg as a souvenir. It was only with the greatest difficulty that the Duke was able to persuade the Czar to accept a Holstein globe in its place. Peter did not appreciate the globe and according to tradition used it for target practice.

Balthasar Denner married Esther Winter in 1712. They had six children, five girls and one boy. In spite of the fact that Denner moved his wife and children from one court to another they were a happy family. The children frequently helped their father in his studio by entertaining his customers with vocal and

(cont'd on p.2)

## Balthasar Denner

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instrumental music during the long tedious sessions and by painting the clothing and background after he had painted the face.

In 1720 Denner went to Hanover where he met many English lords and ladies who invited him to England. He accepted that invitation and took his family to London in 1721. En route they stopped in Rotterdam where they were guests of a well-connected English merchant named Ferly. Balthasar had brought with him a portrait of an old woman. The painting was a minutely detailed demonstration piece with which he hoped to impress his potential clients. Two Dutch painters and art critics, Adrean van der Werff and Karl van Mander, could only compare it to the Mona Lisa. In London the masterpiece caused great excitement and many rich and influential people came to see the painting for themselves. Finally the ambassador from Austria, Baron von Palm, persuaded Denner to send the painting to Vienna where King Karl VI (1685-1740) purchased it for 4700 imperial guilders. Two years later the Hapsburg King asked Denner to paint a portrait of an old man, which could serve as a matching counter-piece for the painting of an old woman. These paintings gave Denner international

acclaim<sup>3</sup>, and his services were in ever-greater demand. It seemed that he had no equal and no competition. The rich and nobility in northern Europe contended to employ Denner as their portrait artist.

Denner, who was always in frail health, could not tolerate the London smog and returned to his home in Altona in 1728.

During this phase of his career he painted a portrait that had an impact on Mennonite history and perhaps on European history. In the fall of 1740 Duke Frederick Karl of Holstein-Gottorp invited Denner to come to Kiel where he painted two life-size portraits of the Duke's twelve-year-old son, Karl Peter Ulrich (1709-1762). Denner also made ten copies of one of the originals. The copies were sent to various courts in Europe. One of the originals was sent to Petersburg where it served as a silent reminder that Peter was an heir to the throne of Russia.

Peter's mother Anna Petrovna (1708-1728) was the eldest daughter of Peter the Great. She died in exile in 1728 shortly after the birth of Peter Ulrich. In November 1741 Anna's sister Elizabeth (1709-1762) led a successful coup and became the Czarina of Russia. Knowing that she would not marry nor have children, Elizabeth appointed a successor within a year of her accession. She adopted her orphaned nephew in 1742 and proclaimed him her heir. Two years later when Peter was 16, Elizabeth brought Sophia Augusta Frederika from Anhalt-Zerbst to Petersburg to be the wife of her adopted heir. When Sophia (Catherine II) came to the throne she was instrumental in bringing the Mennonites to Russia.

Czarina Elizabeth was so impressed with Denner's painting of her adopted son, the future Czar Peter III, that she extended the most generous offer to the artist in 1742. She proposed to pay all his expenses plus an annual fee of one thousand ducats if he would come to Petersburg and serve as her resident portrait artist. Denner politely declined her offer.

This was also a time of pain and sorrow in the artist's family. At the request of his aging parents Denner had moved back to his home and the Mennonite community in Altona. In a period of just over two years three members of the Denner family died and were buried in the Mennonite Cemetery on the Roosen Strasse in Altona. Balthasar's mother Catharina Denner died on December 23, 1743. She was eighty years old. A few months later

his beautiful and very gifted daughter Catharina fell ill and died on August 26, 1744. She was an accomplished vocal soloist, violinist and pianist. She had studied art under her father and was well on the way to fame as a miniature artist. Her early death was a great loss to the Denner family. Balthasar's father Jacob Denner died on February 17, 1746, at the age of eighty-seven. He had served as a minister in the Mennonite Church for more than sixty years. Denner did not paint for about one year. Grief over the loss of loved ones had drained him of his artistic creativity.

When Denner was able to go back to work we find him swamped with commissions in Mecklenburg. During the seven years that Denner lived in London he developed a close friendship with Johan van Gool (1685-1763) whose home was in Rotterdam. Van Gool spent much time with the Denner family and learned to appreciate their hospitality and generosity. In 1749 Van Gool was collecting material for a biographical encyclopedia of Dutch artists and wanted to include a biography of Denner<sup>4</sup>. Denner mailed the requested material on February 14, 1749. As it turned out this was fortunate for posterity because Balthasar Denner died in Rostock on April 14, 1749. There were forty-six unfinished portraits in his studio at the time of his death. His wife Esther and three children Maria, Esther and Jacob survived Denner.

Throughout his entire career Denner had the pleasure of serving people who appreciated his work and showered him with acclaim. To this day many of his paintings can be found in art galleries in northern Europe. A signpost on a small street in Altona bears the name Balthasarweg and silently reminds those who pass by of the Denner family who lived there more than two centuries ago.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> There was a Mennonite church in Altona since 1601. The first members were refugees from various provinces in the Netherlands.

<sup>2</sup> The painting is now in the Oldenburg Castle in Eutin.

<sup>3</sup> These two portraits are in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

<sup>4</sup> The University of Amsterdam has that encyclopedia.

<sup>5</sup> The unfinished paintings are in the Schwerin Staatliches Museum. That museum has 75 Denner portraits.

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Editors: Alf Redekopp (MHC)

Heinrich Loewen (CMBS)

Associate Editor: Conrad Stoesz

All correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to the editorial offices at:

600 Shaftesbury Blvd.

Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4

P: 204-888-6781

E: aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca

W: www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives

or

1-169 Riverton Avenue,

Winnipeg, MB R2L 2E5

P: 204-669-6575

E: hloewen@mbconf.ca

W: www.mbconf.ca/mbstudies

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# Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp

## Queries

**Berendt** – Looking for my relatives. Herman Berent and his wife from the village Alexandrovka close to Zhytomyr in the province Volhynia, and a cousin Alexander Berendt. migrated to Canada around 1927. Herman had two sons--Herman and Karl. Contact: Natalia Berend, Ahornweg 7, 14728 Rhinow, Germany.

**Derksen/Nickel** – Looking for information about the relatives Anna Derksen (1846-1925) who married Johann Nickel (1842-) and had at least one child - Jacob Nickel (1860-). Jacob had two children, Jacob (1906-) and Anna (1896-), who came to Canada in 1926 with Wilhelm and Elizabeth Warkentin. Contact Lyla Nickel, Box 20003, Golden, BC V0A 1V0 or growly@redshift.bc.ca.

## Recent Books

G.E. Rempel, *Rempel Family Book: A Family History and Genealogy of Wilhelm and Agatha (Sawatzky) Rempel and their descendants* (Winkler, Man., : Private publication, 2000) 506 pp.

This compilation documents the family history and descendants of Wilhelm Rempel (1820-1901) and his wife Agatha Sawatzky (1825-1882) who initially raised their family in Rosenthal, Choritz Colony and migrated to Canada in 1878, where they settled in the village of Blumenort in the Mennonite West Reserve. Some descendants moved to Saskatchewan at the turn of the century and a little later to Mexico. From Mexico descendants have spread to countries such as Belize, Bolivia and Paraguay. The books shows how the descendants today are "scattered all over the Americas." Contact: George Rempel, 804-325 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Winkler, MB R6W 1G5.

Marianne Ferris, *The Neufelds: The Gerhard G. Neufeld & Margaretha Rempel Story* (Morden, Man.: Private publication, 2003) 296 pp.

This compilation contains the story of Gerhard G. Neufeld (1879-1949) who was born in Schoenhorst, South Russia,

married Margaretha A. Rempel (1882-1966) of Osterwick, South Russia, and emigrated to Canada in 1926. In Canada the family settled at Boissevain, Manitoba. Gerhard G. Neufeld was ordained to the ministry in 1910 in Central, South Russia and was the first leader of the Whitewater Mennonite Church organized in Manitoba in 1927. This book includes some historical background, including the ancestry data, historic photographs, current photographs of the descendants, biographical information and reflections. Contact: Marianne Ferris, Box 1538, Morden, MB R6M 1B4

Keith Kroeker, *Kroeker Family CD Project* (Courtney, BC: Private publication, 2003)

As the title suggests, this family history is in the form of a compact disc. This CD contains photos and information on the history of Franz Kroeker (1866-1954) and his wife Susanna Wiens (1872-1947) who were both born in the Molotschna Colony, left Russia in 1879 and 1878, respectively, with their parents, settling first in Nebraska, then Oklahoma, and finally Saskatchewan. The CD contains over 600 photos and well over 500 documents ranging from land deeds to copies of bank books, invoices and letters. Contact: Keith Kroeker, 224 Spindrift Road, Courtney, BC V9N 9S9

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## Ships used on the Baltic Sea

In early Oct 2003 I visited the port of Libau (known today as Liepaja). In a marine museum there I found a set of photographs of ships that were used for passenger traffic in the 1920s. Among them was the *Baltara*, which is the ship on which my family traveled from Libau on August 27, 1926. I would be particularly interested in hearing from anyone whose family traveled on the *Baltara* on that particular day. If any readers are interested in obtaining a copy of the photo of *Baltara*, they could write me as well. Contact Arthur Kroeger, 245 Springfield Road, Ottawa, ON K1M 0L1

## The Canadian Genealogy Centre adds a new Online Guide for Aboriginal Genealogy

Library and Archives Canada is adding a new guide to its virtual Canadian Genealogy Centre. Titled *Researching Your Aboriginal Ancestry* at Library and Archives Canada ([http://www.genealogie.gc.ca/02/020501a\\_e.html](http://www.genealogie.gc.ca/02/020501a_e.html)), the guide is designed for those who wish to undertake genealogical research on their Aboriginal ancestors at Library and Archives Canada.

The production of this guide by the Canadian Genealogy Centre is part of a collaboration between Library and Archives Canada and Aboriginal researchers. The Centre also intends to work with Aboriginal communities and other partners on a second part of the guide, which would provide even more information on the sources available to researchers throughout Canada.

According to Richard Collins, who wrote the guide and is one of the Aboriginal genealogy specialists at Library and Archives Canada, "the best part of this new tool is that it allows everyone to acquire the proper methodology to do effective genealogical research while avoiding numerous pitfalls."

The wealth and diversity of Canada's Aboriginal cultures bring a unique quality to the lives of many Canadians. More and more people find pride in seeking out their Aboriginal roots as they turn to Library and Archives Canada for help in their research.

To access "Researching Your Aboriginal Ancestry" at Library and Archives Canada, you can go to the Canadian Genealogy Centre Web site at [www.genealogy.gc.ca](http://www.genealogy.gc.ca), click on "How To" then click on "Guides."

The Canadian Genealogy Centre is made possible through the support of the Canadian Culture Online Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Information: Louisa Coates, Media Relations, Library and Archives Canada (613) 992-9361/cell: (613) 295-5516, e-mail: [lcoates@archives.ca](mailto:lcoates@archives.ca).

Send inquiries to Alf Redekopp, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4 or e-mail: [aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca](mailto:aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca)

## Precious Family Heirlooms with a Story

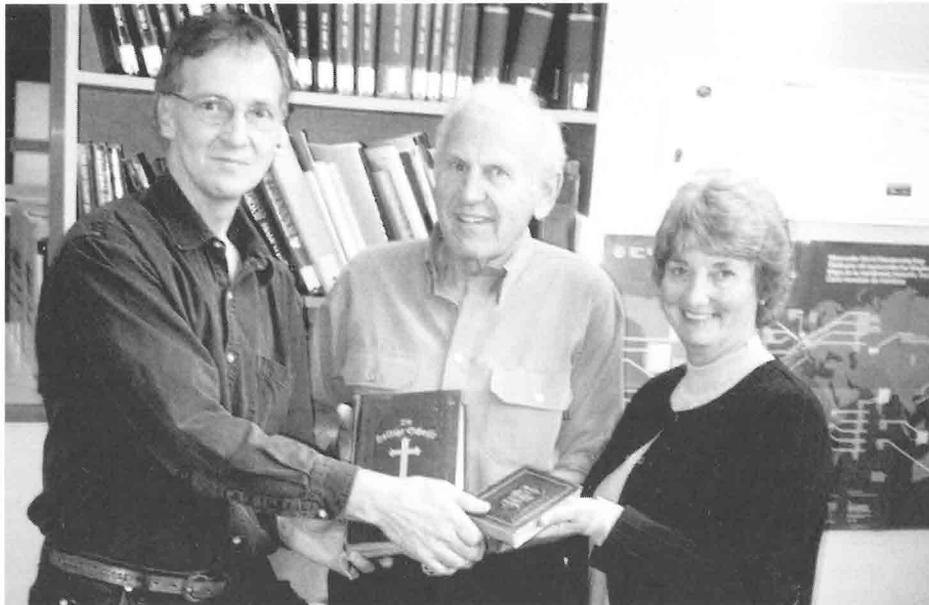
by Alf Redekopp

On September 22, 2003, Hubert and Elaine Plichá of Parkes, New South Wales, Australia delivered two family heirlooms to the Mennonite Heritage Centre – a family Bible and hymn book, owned by Hubert's mother, Margarete Plichá, nee Wiens. These items together with several other small books were the items which Margarete packaged in a little suitcase and held close to her wherever she went from the time she left her home in the Russian city of Rostov in 1942, throughout the war years, into Germany as a German prisoner of war, and on to Australia where she emigrated in 1949. Margarete Plichá is currently still living in a nursing home in Australia, suffering from Alzheimer's Disease or some form of dementia. She spoke very little about her background and experiences in Russia, and the children and grandchildren never heard about her Mennonite heritage. When asked one day, about her religion in Russia where she grew up, she said, "it was something like the Baptists".

Through the genealogical interest of Margarete's daughter-in-law (as well as a grandchild), more and more of Margarete's story has been discovered. Margarete's son, Hubert, also has begun to discover distantly repressed memories. (Elaine would sometimes ask her mother-in-law why Hubert had no childhood memories. Margarete would usually not dialogue very long before it was clear she did not want to speak about it.)

One day Hubert and Elaine Plichá's eldest son Michael discovered a book entitled "The Wiens Family Chronicle" compiled by David Wiens of Ottawa, Ontario (1994). Through directory assistance Elaine made the contact via phone, which confirmed that they were relatives, since both claimed to be related to the Jacob Wiens who owned the brick factory in the Kuban Settlement in South Russia.

Margarete's life began in the Kuban Colony where she was born in 1912. Her parents were Jacob Wiens (1868-1918) and Maria Fast (d. 1923). After Margarete's mother died in 1923, she and her younger brother, were taken in by their uncle Kornelius Wiens (1866-1944). Wiens was ordained as a Mennonite Brethren minister in 1885 and as an Elder



**Mennonite Heritage Centre Director Alf Redekopp receiving a family Bible and hymn book from Hubert and Elaine Plichá of Parkes, NSW, Australia, September 22, 2003.**

in 1905. (See P.M. Friesen). When conditions became grim under the New Economic Policy of the Communist regime (property liquidation, arrests, exiles, etc.), Margarete and her brother David, learned that they were to be targeted for arrest. With 24 hours notice, they were placed on a train to leave the Kuban in 1929. So as a 17-year old Margarete and her younger brother were on their own. The family seems to have lost contact or most knowledge of her story beyond that, except that Margarete married a Russian.

Elaine and Hubert told me that Margarete had married a Russian in the city of Rostov and had several children. One of the children was Hubert (b. 1936). He also had an older brother. This Russian husband abused Margarete and used to beat her. At some point he left. Hubert's brother is supposed to have left to live with his father sometime as a boy of about 10 years old (i.e. he disappeared one day and it was learned that he had boarded a train and found where his father was living). Hubert remained particularly precious to his mother.

One day in 1942 when the German forces occupied Rostov, Margarete encountered a German soldier interrogating a Russian woman rather abusively. Margarete stepped in as an interpreter. The soldier realizing her fluent Russian and German, seconded her to be an interpreter for them. She did not want to go and was quite forceful. She had her 6-year old son Hubert to take care of. Nevertheless she was allowed to

return to her home and pack a few things. This is when she prepared the little suitcase with the items most precious to her – a Bible, a hymn book, an autograph book, a little story book signed by her Uncle Kornelius Wiens, 25 Dec. 1926. Hubert remained with the soldiers. Today, he says he can still remember being around these huge tanks, guns, and other military vehicles. He would see his mother once in a while because she could be away at the front for several weeks.

At the end of the war, when Germany was defeated, they found themselves in a German military camp, which was located in Rendsburg, Schleswig Holstein, Germany. The British and Polish Liberating Army took charge of the camp and freed the prisoners. Margarete found herself working in the kitchen serving food to the troops. She wrote a letter to a friend in Russia with code language, in an attempt to determine whether she should consider returning. A letter came back describing the "wonderful vacation they were planning to take to Siberia." This was the code for "do not consider returning". In order to survive and not be repatriated to Russia, she married a Polish man by the surname of Plichá who was a soldier with the Polish army that liberated them. Her son was given new identification papers stating that he was born in Poland and he was given the surname of this step-father. (Throughout the war, Margarete had insisted that Hubert, introduce himself as "Hubert Wiens" using his mother's maiden name,

(cont'd on p. 5)

## Anabaptist reconciliation with Reformed Church in Zurich in June 2004

by Kendra King

NEWTON, Kan. (MC USA) -- An official ceremony of reconciliation between leaders of the Reformed Church in Zurich and Anabaptist descendants from around the world will take place in Zurich, Switzerland this summer.

### Family Heirlooms

(cont'd from p. 4)

not the surname of his Russian father.) Any identification pages in the precious heirlooms (i.e. family history pages, name, etc) were removed, in order to protect themselves.

Margarete used every avenue open to her to locate her brother but eventually came to believe that David had been killed in the war.

In 1949 Margaret and her new husband, emigrated to Australia. Their religion became Catholic (80% of Poles are Catholic). Margarete never was happy with the Catholic church but that is where she attended because of her new husband's background. Despite being a marriage of convenience for survival, and not out of love, the union became a good life-long relationship. The memories of her early life must have been too painful and hence best left behind and forgotten. Nevertheless with the prodding of the next generation, a new discovery and appreciation has been gained for what she went through.

Daughter-in-law Elaine Plichá was born in the UK. Her parents were Anglican when they migrated to Australia. Gradually they became more disillusioned with the "High Anglican" tradition. During their final years, they found meaning in associating with the Baptist church. Elaine and Hubert Plichá now also identify themselves with the Baptist Church.

Since Margarete had guarded these books with her life and they survived all of these years, Hubert and Elaine did not want future generations to just throw them out. When she heard that the Mennonite Historical Library would accept them, they decided to deliver them personally and place them in the care of the MHC Archives.

For six months beginning in March, the Evangelical-Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich will commemorate the 500th anniversary of Heinrich Bullinger, one of the fathers of the Reformed Church. On June 26, they will also honor Felix Manz, a founder of the Anabaptist movement, in a special ceremony. As a part of this ceremony, a memorial to Manz will be unveiled and placed on the bank of the Limmat River, where Manz was drowned in 1527 for his Anabaptist convictions.

Recently, officials of the Reformed Church in Zurich have expressed a desire to acknowledge their "shadow side," including 16th- and 17th-century persecution and execution of Anabaptists.

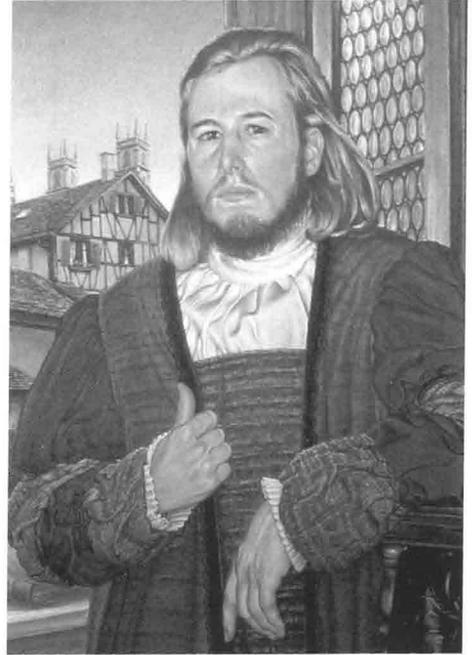
"The Reformation started as a movement of renewal but immediately turned out to become a story of separations," said Peter Dettwiler, ecumenical officer of the Evangelical-Reformed Church in Zurich. "It's time to set a memorial in the city of Zurich where the roots of both the Reformed and the Anabaptists are to be found."

The Reformed Church has invited 100 North American representatives to join in this ceremony of past acknowledgement and future hope. These individuals are to include Amish and Hutterites, as well as other spiritual descendants of Anabaptists. In addition, Larry Miller of (MWC) is coordinating the broader participation by the worldwide Mennonite and Brethren in Christ community. Swiss Mennonites are playing an important role in the planning.

John Sharp, director of the Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee and Archives, is coordinating North American participation in this commemoration. Sharp became involved in planning this event quite by chance last June. Through a relative, John Zook, an airline pilot who frequently flies to Switzerland, Sharp's name was given to Elisabeth Lutz, a friend in Zurich. Both Lutz and Zook were involved in negotiating the approval and placement of the Manz marker.

Sharp traveled to Zurich to participate in the discussions, and also met with officials of the Evangelical Reformed Church for conversation on the proposed conference.

While this will be a historic commemoration, it is not an isolated event, Sharp said. Other similar discussions have taken place in the past. In 1983, MWC participated in a discussion with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, followed by a public



Felix Manz: Allegorical portrait by Oliver Wendell Shenk

service of confession for injustice during the Reformation.

This dialogue resumed again in 1984 and 1989. Swiss Mennonites and state church representatives have engaged in various steps toward understanding and reconciliation in the last 20 years. More recently, in 2002, some Mennonites, Amish and members of the Reformed Church gathered informally to engage in discussion and acknowledgement of past wrongs.

"All of these conversations seem to be part of an emerging ecumenical impulse toward reconciliation," Sharp said. "The challenge is to engage in serious discussions of core commitments, so that reconciliation ceremonies like this one have integrity."

So what makes this event special? This will be the largest gathering of officials and members of the Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich and Anabaptist descendants, Sharp said.

"The setting for this conference -- the great cathedral, where the dramatic actions that birthed the Anabaptist movement took place -- adds to its historic nature," Sharp said. "In Zurich, participants will have an opportunity to engage in conversations of hope with two once-adversarial traditions."

In addition, the memorial to Manz will be unveiled on the bank of the Limmat River at the place of his execution.

"It will be a great honor and a joy to

(cont'd on p. 11)



## CMC History Project

For the past year and a half, Adolf Ens, Professor Emeritus of History and Theology, Canadian Mennonite University, has researched and written a soon to be published manuscript on the history of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC).

This book will be the third volume in a series of history projects brought to fruition by the Heritage Centre since 1999, although the ideas had been discussed for over a decade. The biographies of two long-time leaders of the Conference, J.J. Thiessen and David Toews, were published in 2001 and 2002. This volume is scheduled for release in June 2004.

There was obviously no shortage of source material at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives for compiling this story. A complete set of minutes of Conference sessions is available, printed in annual yearbooks since 1928, and for the ministers conference from 1928 through 1980. Provincial and area conference histories for Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario and a large number of published congregational histories are held in the Mennonite Historical Library, developed in partnership with the Canadian Mennonite University. There is also a wealth of information in numerous unpublished shorter congregational studies.

The Conference of Mennonites in Canada changed its name to Mennonite Church Canada at its 97<sup>th</sup> annual session in St. Louis, Missouri in 1999. This book will present an overview of the formation and development of this church family from its two German-speaking founding partners in 1902 to the 238 congregations which together crossed the threshold to become a full-fledged Canadian church-Mennonite Church Canada.

Watch for further details to come!

A.R.

## Heritage Centre Addresses Storage Crisis

For a number of years there has been a concern at the Heritage Centre that the space for archival storage will soon be filled up.

Sometime in 1998 Director Ken Reddig informally investigated the feasibility of creating a 2<sup>nd</sup> level of storage in the vault, since it was always thought that the high 40-foot ceiling would allow for a mezzanine or upper storage level. It was disappointing to learn at that point that significant additional structural work on the foundation would be required to support the weight of a second floor filled with archival records.

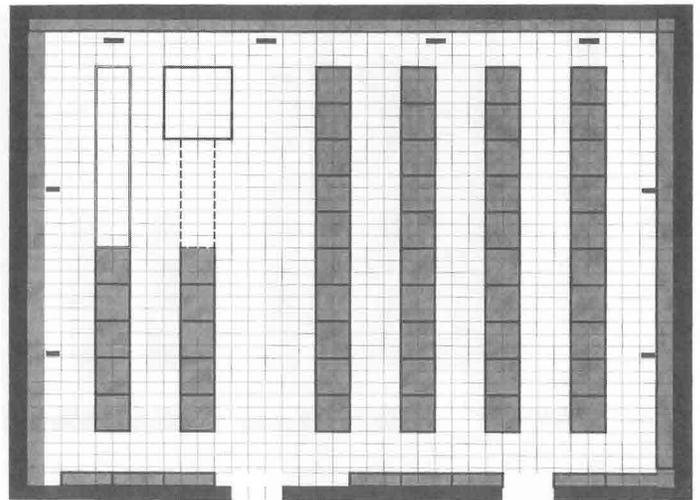
In October 2002 the Christian Formation Council of Mennonite Church Canada, who are now responsible for the Mennonite Heritage Centre program, acknowledged the need for additional archival storage by agreeing that the Centre secure a written report from a structural engineer which would include recommendations for a solution to best address the space shortage.

One of options which would not require additional structural work on the foundation, consisted of installing high-density mobile shelves. Utilizing the space currently used up by the aisles could double the archival storage space. By placing the existing shelves on carriages that

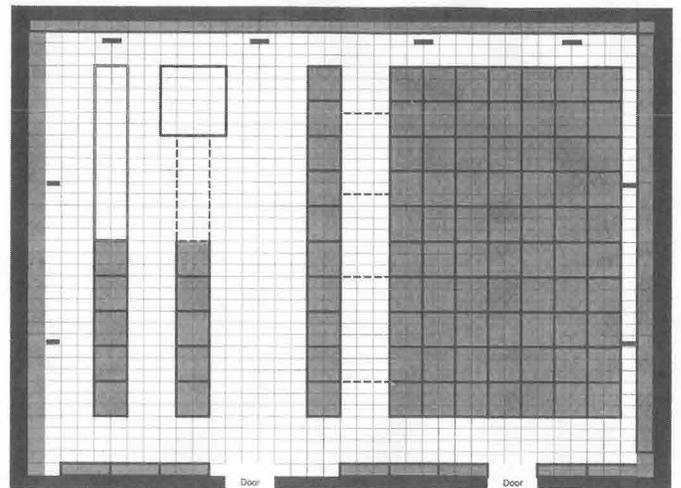
would ride on a track set on the floor, only one aisle would be needed. (See the drawings below)

When the report from the structural engineers showed that the current floor would support a mobile system, we began to explore how we might be able to get enough financial support to accomplish the project.

This project has already received the support of the Canadian Council of Archives of the Government of Canada, The Winnipeg Foundation, The Thomas Sill Foundation and the Mennonite Foundation of Canada. Readers of the *Historian* and users of the archives are still invited to make additional cash gifts to this capital project. A.R.



Rough sketch of current floor layout of the MHC archival vault showing shelves and aisles.



Rough sketch showing additional storage space after installation of mobile shelves.

## How To Survive in a New Culture

by Heinrich Loewen

"Umsielder - Survival in a New Culture" was the title of my lecture at the event of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC on February 21, 2004. The intention of the topic was to make the Mennonites here in Canada more aware of the struggles their brothers and sisters face in Germany. In the first part of the lecture, we dealt with the historical, confessional and cultural background which shaped the DNA of these churches. In the second part, we looked at how they adjusted to the political, economic, social, cultural and religious environment in Germany.

An encouraging fact is that our brothers and sisters in Germany have the largest and fastest growing free churches in Germany. Because if this growth, they have changed the free church landscape in Germany. They have learned how to endure under persecution and now have to find out how to survive in freedom. Although the adjustment to the new culture takes a lot of energy and creates many tensions between the generations, these churches don't forget to preach the gospel to others. The conservative churches reach out more to their own children and Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany. The progressive churches are more open to reaching out to the native Germans. However, both groups are very active in the former Soviet Union. Their background and their knowledge of the culture and language of these countries make their ministry very successful. Again, the more progressive churches go a step further and reach out beyond their cultural boundaries and Commonwealth

of Independent States. They have missionary endeavors in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and South America.

Although the Mennonites in Canada left Russia earlier than their brothers and sisters in Germany and have been in a western culture longer than their spiritual and ethnic siblings in Europe, they still struggle with their Russian German DNA. At least, this is my observation after being here in Canada for more than one year. In preparation for my presentation on the topic "How I See the MBs in Canada from a European Perspective", which I delivered at the Bakerview MB Church in BC on February 22, I spent a lot of time reflecting on our church here in Canada. There are many aspects of our constituency I am glad for and proud of. However, there are some concerns as well.

Most of them have to do with how we treat our spiritual and cultural DNA or heritage. It seems to me that the older generation has more appreciation for what God has done in the past and is proud of being Mennonite or Anabaptist. The younger generation associates with the name Mennonite more a Russian German culture and less an Anabaptist theology. In order to get rid of the ethnic aspects of their parents' background, the younger people ignore an essential part of their own DNA. By denying the past, they are in danger of losing their theological identity as well. With a weak theological backbone, we are vulnerable for adjusting too much to our culture. If we do it, we will lose the function of salt and light in this world. Older people prefer to look back and younger to look ahead. We need both and each other. In order to be relevant and countercultural, the present generation needs the conversation with the past about the future. "The best prophet of the future is the past!"



CENTRE FOR  
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## Abe Dueck Appointed Director of the Historical Commission

The Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission has appointed Dr. Abe Dueck of Winnipeg as its next Executive Secretary. Dueck comes to this position following 12 years of service as the Director of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg and over 20 years as Professor and Academic Dean of the former Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg.

The Historical Commission is responsible for fostering historical understanding and appreciation within the Mennonite Brethren Church in the United States and Canada. It coordinates preservation of historical documents, publishes books and audio-visuals and sponsors conferences and symposia related to Mennonite Brethren History.

Previous directors have been Dr. J.B. Toews and until recently Dr. Paul Toews.

Dueck notes that he comes to this position with "a sincere desire to make our history as a church relevant as it seeks to fulfill its mission in the world today." Dueck begins his new responsibilities in March, 2004.

## CMBS Director Resigns

It is with regret that Cam Rowland, Executive Director, Discipleship Ministries, Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Studies, announced Heinrich Loewen's resignation from the Center for MB Studies. Heinrich has accepted the position of President at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit (ETF) in Belgium. The ETF is a protestant theological university, which offers degrees (Bachelor, Master, and Ph.D) in theology and religious studies and is accredited by the Belgium government and the European Union. Heinrich will continue his ministry with CMBS until June 30, 2004.



Land dedication for the new Mennonite Brethren Ministry Centre in south Winnipeg, which will include a significant archival section., Jan 23 2004. Photo by Conrad Stoesz.

## Molochna'04 - Tentative Calendar of Events for 2004

by Leona Gislason

This year marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Molochna Mennonite Settlement in 1804. The events will take place in two clusters, the first in June and the second in October during the annual Mennonite Dnieper Cruise.

### I. Cluster One, June 2004

- 1) Wednesday, June 2, until Saturday, June 5, 2004, International Scholarly Conference, "Molochna Mennonites and their Neighbours, 1804-2004," Melitopol State Pedagogical University.
- 2) Friday, June 4, 17:00-18:30, gala opening and reception, Molochna Bicentennial Photographic and Furniture Exhibition, Melitopol City Museum.
- 3) Wednesday, June 2-Wednesday, June 9, 2004, several still-being-organized evening public lectures on themes relating to the Molochna bicentennial, Mennonite Centre Ukraine, Molochansk, Ukraine.
- 4) Saturday, June 5, 14:30-16:30, Unveiling of railway memorial at the Lichtenau/Svetlodolinskoe railway station.
- 5) Sunday, June 6, Molochansk/Halbstadt, day-long festivities, planned and sponsored by the City of Molochansk and the International Mennonite Memorial Committee, as follows: a) Mennonite religious service, 9:30-11:00. b) Unveiling and dedication of Molochna Bicentennial Settler Monument, main square, Molochansk, 11:30-12:30. c) Molochna Mennonite Bicentennial Concert, main square, Molochansk (performance of Victor Davies' Mennonite Piano Concerto by pianist Irmgard Baerg, Canada, and a Ukrainian stringed quartet, and of Mennonite hymns by Ukrainian choir and folk instrument orchestra), 12:30-13:30. d) 14:00-16:00 Bicentennial dinner for 150 invited guests.
- 6) Monday evening, June 7, 19:00-20:30, university lecture in Zaporizhzhia or Dnipropetrovsk by Mr. V. Peter Harder (himself of Molochna Mennonite parentage), Canada's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- 7) Tuesday morning, June 8, 10:30-12:00, village of Vladovka/Waldheim, unveiling of memorial plaques in memory of founders of Waldheim

Hospital and of the I.J. Neufeld and Company Farm Implements Factory.

- 8) Tuesday afternoon, June 8, 15:00-16:30, unveiling and dedication of historical village memorial in old cemetery of Gnadenfeld/Bogdanovka.

### II. Cluster Two, October, 2004

- 1) Sunday, October 10, 2004, day-long festivities, planned and sponsored by Ukrainian Mennonite churches, the Dnieper Mennonite Heritage Cruise, and the International Mennonite Memorial Committee, as follows: a) Morning, Bicentennial Thanksgiving Service, Tokmak theatre (present will be 180 cruise passengers, Ukrainian Mennonite congregations, and other guests). b) Lunch in a Tokmak restaurant and in Petershagen Mennonite church. c) Afternoon, 15:30-17:00, unveiling and dedication of Johann Cornies memorial at village of Kirovo/Juschalee (site of Cornies' famous estate at southern end of one-time Molochna settlement).
- 2) Other events in planning for October 2004: There are plans in progress for a large children's art program and exhibits in a number of Molochna schools. There will likely be a special theme bus tour on Sat., Oct. 9 which will have project leaders, the Wiens sisters from Colorado and Kansas, visiting key participating schools in one-time Molochna Mennonite villages with cruise musicians.

Of wider interest, the cruise's 2003 "Music for young Ukrainian audiences" program will be expanded with four professional Canadian performers and music clinicians giving master classes at the Zaporizhzhia College of Music, with an evening concert that will include the students.

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## Book Reviews

(cont'd from p. 12)

live with relatives, till Father returned, and then to Kronsweide, which they would have to leave before long also. Cornusha died as a four-year old during these transitions. Then came the move to Nikopol where they experienced the trepidations of adjusting to a very strange environment, with problems enormously compounded by the invasion of the city by the German army. Father was taken again, this time never to return, in 1937.

Mother would now give unstinting energy to working at any tasks, so she could provide most minimal support for the family. She is recalled as taking precious time, even then, to offer Christian education and inspiration to the children.

In 1943 they found a chance to leave the Soviet Union altogether. They managed to arrange for transport west with the fleeing German army, through stretches of Poland to Osterode in East Prussia. John had been forced to join the Germany army by now. He would later be able to investigate West Germany for a place to settle, help the family reach Hamburg, and finally a place called Totenhausen for a temporary home.

It had been possible for everyone to get jobs of some sort now and then, and before too long the idea of leaving Germany to go to Canada had emerged. By 1946 they had made it to Gronau where for the first time they encountered large groups of Mennonites, then the Buchholz immigration camp to become part of the process to leave for Canada. A long period of waiting their turn began.

The concern for context is evident throughout the book as pertinent features of the larger span of complex political and related developments of Europe in particular, are interspersed with the comments from family members as their trip continues. Brief endnotes point to sources used for historical background, and helpful directives for further readings about the freedom journeys of others mentioned along the way.

One also detects a finely-tuned philosophical dimension highlighted by appropriate quotes to introduce each chapter, and concluded with a personal note to the recently-departed, at ninety-six, "Oma" Katharina, from the author herself.

The artistic aspects must not be ignored – the dust jacket, for instance, providing a photo of the family on the back of the book, and a broken version of it for the cover, admirably done by Aniko Szabo of Winnipeg, with everything included appearing in excellent book format and text design by Gil Hui. This is not to mention the very thorough editing, and truly satisfying publishing texture, which leaves the book about as free from mistakes and "glitches" as a volume like this can get. Perhaps one could say it might usefully have included a map, since many places are mentioned, and could indicate in succinct summary, how far everyone in the family had really come.

## Germans From Siberia Publications: A Review Article

by Lawrence Klippenstein

Publishing books on Germans from Siberia is definitely a booming industry nowadays. For this commentary on some of them, a stack of seven volumes is within arm's reach of my computer. Nearly half of them are in the Russian language but four are available in the German language. That makes the latter more accessible to *Mennonite Historian* readers so I will mention them first.

The most ambitious of these is certainly the hardcover two-volume work (553 and 540 pages respectively) by Victor Bruhl entitled *Die Deutschen in Sibirien: Eine hundertjaehrige Geschichte von der Ansiedlung bis zur Auswanderung* (The Germans of Siberia: A Hundred-Year History from Early Settlement to Emigration) published in 2003 by the Historischer Forschungsverein der Deutschen aus Russland e.V in Nuerenberg, Germany. Bruhl, a native of Siberia now living in Germany, provides these volumes as an expanded and revised second edition of what he first published in 1995 as a two-volume work, *Nemtzii v Zapadnii Sibirii* (The Germans of Western Siberia) in the Russian language. It is arguably now the most comprehensive, archivally-based study of the topic ever to reach the Western reading public.

Volume I includes two initial chapters discussing the notorious "German question" of late nineteenth century Russia, and the migrations of Germans, including the Mennonites, to Siberia up to 1917. The issue of group relations between the German population of Siberia and other surrounding peoples, is a central theme from the outset of this study.

The remaining three chapters discuss developments during the inter-war years from 1917 to 1940. The All-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Association becomes a case study here for illustrating the relentless process of pressure, intimidation and internal bureaucratic restructuring by which this was achieved. Forced collectivization, the success of putting an end to all efforts to obtain outside aid, and the brief duration of a German raion (municipality), are among the topics of the rest of the book.

The seven chapters of Volume II form a difficult piece of history just to read, and even more so to reflect on in depth. Here the author discusses the forced resettlement of deported Germans in Siberian areas during World War II - the degradations of the Trudarmiija (forced labour camps), the cancellation of all legal rights, etc. Special camps came into being not long after WWII, but by 1955 some relaxation of pressure followed, and another emigration movement, the most massive ever for Germans in Russia was launched. The exodus of all Germans had come to be seen as the only way out to retain the people's solidarity and self-identification.

The details of Bruhl's research and how he reached his conclusion that there never was in the Soviet Union any serious attention to give the Germans a real and meaningful place in the national life of the country, form a challenge of reading and digestion of material which may daunt many who tackle these volumes, but they are a must for understanding the topic discussed here.

The same needs to be said about the nearly 500-page work by Andrej Savin, of Novosibirsk, Siberia (chapters 1-5) and Detlef Brandes, of Goettingen, Germany (chapters 6-9) in *Die Sibirien-Deutschen im Sowjetstaat 1919-1938* (The Siberian Germans in the Soviet Union 1919-1938), published in 2001 in Essen, Germany.

This study also is heavily based on detailed archival research in Siberian and other document centres, and understandably follows the major themes of Bruhl though within a somewhat shorter chronological span of focus. It gives a good deal more attention than does Bruhl, to the Mennonite sector of the Siberian Germans, especially in chapter 3 which is titled "The Mennonite Communities of Siberia and the All Russian Mennonite Agricultural Association". The topic of German schools (again, with attention to Mennonites also) is given careful study too.

The extensive bibliographies of both volumes offer a golden opportunity to pursue the separate themes and broad topics even further. Libraries will want both of these works in their Slavic holdings.

A specialized and most interesting supplement to the above titles is Robert Friesen's hardcover, 382-paged study, *Auf den Spuren der Ahnen 1882-1992. Die Vorgeschichte und 110 Jahre der*

*Deutschen im Talas Tal in Mittelasien* (Finding the Trail of our Ancestors: A Historical Introduction and 110 Years of Germans in the Talas Valley in Central Asia), published privately (it seems) in Minden, Germany, in 2000, with a second edition (this one) in 2001. Friesen is interested above all in a number of smaller Mennonite communities which existed in the neighbourhood of the city of Aule Ata (Dzhambul later), and in other nearby Kirgizien areas. Villages like Leninpol, Ak Metchet near Chiva, Orlov, Johannesdorf, Bergthal (later called Rotfront), and six or seven other nearby villages are the focus of this study.

The book includes hundreds of individuals by name, a large selection of photos, quotes from letters, reports, documents, etc. to make it the most detailed study ever published of this smaller, less known area of the Russian Mennonite community.

Russian-language works in this survey which contribute significantly to Siberian German research are the following: *Njemtzy v Rossii: Rossiisko-Njemetzkii Dialog* (The Germans of Russia: A Russian-German Dialogue), edited by N.V. Koltakova et al, and published in St. Petersburg in 2001 (hdc, 550 pp). In this collection of essays on many German contributions to the life and culture of Russia and the Soviet Union one finds two chapters (by Peter Vibe, pp. 399ff and V.A. Diatlova, pp. 432ff respectively) on German economic developments and dialects of Siberia.

Trudarmiija (labour camps) are portrayed in documents in "*Mobilizovat' Njemtzev v Rabochie Kolonny...I. Stalin*": *Sbornik Dokumentov (1940-e gody)* (To Mobilize the Germans in Labour Columns... I.Stalin": Collection of Documents from the 1940s), published in Moscow by Gotika in 1998. Abram Abramovich Fast is the author of another work which includes many documents, *V Setiakh OGPU - NKVD (Njemetzkii raion Altaiskovo kraia v 1927- 1938* (In the Nets of the OGPU and the NKVD: The German Raion of the Altai Region in 1927-1938), published as a hardcover, 460-paged volume in Barnaul, Siberia, in 2000. Many references to the Mennonites of these communities are found in this study.

All of the volumes may be read at the Heritage Centre, located at 600 Shaftesbury Boulevard, in Winnipeg, Manitoba.



This school building, constructed in 1904 in the village of Altbergthal three miles west of the village of Altona, is now standing behind the Millenium Centre. It is being worked on as an interpretive centre for the area. The building will be a focal point during the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations by the Altbergthal community and others celebrating 1879-2004. For further info contact Ray Klippenstein at 204-324-6026. Photo: Courtesy of Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg, MB.

## The Altbergthal 125th Anniversary (1879-2004)

by Lawrence and Ray Klippenstein

Altbergthal heritage activity notes have been reaching some of you from time to time during the past several years. We would like to update things somewhat, and focus especially on the 125th anniversary of the community.

To begin with, we draw attention to the book *Aeltester Johann Funk*, published by Mary Dueck Jeffery a number of years ago. A brief introduction to the book included a number of photos and brief paragraphs on Altbergthal since Rev. Funk lived in that community from 1880-1917(?) when he died, and was buried in the village cemetery there. All his work as minister and then Aeltester of the newly formed West Lynne Mennonite Church on the West Reserve was conducted from his Altbergthal office.

The Altbergthal heritage projects otherwise began to take shape with the moving of the Altbergthal school building to Altona from Neuhoffnung School District where it had been moved in the early 1980s after Neuhoffnung S.D. and Rudnerweide S.D. were amalgated in the early 1960s. It was hoped that the school building would eventually become a

school museum or something related.

The school building, now situated behind the Millenium Centre in Altona, is a century old this year, although the community itself had begun 25 years earlier. The celebrations will feature the history of the community (alcady sketched out in an article in the book *Church, Family and Village*, edited by Adolf Ens, Jacob Peters and Otto Hamm, and published in 2000). Other types of program events will be planned, including a reunion in the fall if plans work out.

It is hoped that more work on the school museum will be initiated this year. More announcements on this should be appearing shortly. If you have any information about the teachers or other aspects of the community, which you think would help the history project contact either of us (Lawrence, 204-895-4421 or klippensteinL@aol.com; or Ray, 204-324-6026) as soon as possible. We are also looking for persons to work on a local planning committee for the anniversary program. Thank you for any kind of support and help you can provide.

## Book Notes

by Adolf Ens, Winnipeg

When George K. Epp died of cancer in the fall of 1997 the first volume of his planned comprehensive history of Mennonites in Russia had just come off the press. The second volume, taking the story to about 1870, appeared a year later. Thanks to the efforts of Peter Letkemann, volume 3 of *Geschichte der Mennoniten in Russland* has now been published as *Neues Leben in der Gemeinschaft: „Das Commonwealth der Mennoniten“ 1871-1914* (Lage: Logos Verlag GmbH, 2003). Its 403 pages contain the first 5 (of 12 planned) chapters that Epp had substantially completed at the time of his illness. As readers probably know, Epp wrote in German because his primary intended audience was the large community of *Aussiedler* who were robbed of access to their own story by the terrible conditions of the Soviet era. One hopes that someone will take up the task of completing this project.

Several smaller new books in German make further contributions to Anabaptist history, especially in Russia. Johann Epp, Bielefeld, Germany, has completed a biography of Abraham Unger, founder of the Mennonite Brethren group in Chortitza Colony. *Erwecket euren lauterer Sinn: Der Älteste Abraham Unger (1825-1880), Begründer der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde in der Alten Kolonie in Russland* (Lage: Logos Verlag GmbH, 2003). The last 50 pages of this 221-page book are a reprint of the 1902 Mennonite Brethren Confession together with a list of its signatories in Russian and German.

The 215-page account of free churches in Russia-USSR up to 1944 by Heinrich Loewen jun. *Russische Freikirchen: Die Geschichte der Evangeliums-christen und Baptisten bis 1944*, was published as volume 8 of *Missiologica Evangelica* in 1995 by the Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft in Bonn. Given the long association of Mennonites with Baptists and other evangelicals in Russia, especially in the Soviet era after the 1930s, this account will help *Aussiedler* to a better self-understanding. Although written before access had been granted to Russian archives, the volume is nevertheless informative for western readers.

Helmut T. Huebert's *Molotschna*

*Historical Atlas* (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 2003) will quickly become a widely used reference volume. In addition to maps of the 57 villages of Molotschna, the second Mennonite colony in Russia, founded 1804, Huebert includes numerous estates as well as a number of maps of the colony itself and its environs at various times in history. Equally helpful is the compendium of brief (generally 2 to 5 columns in the 8½ x 11 format) accounts of each village.

Retired pastor and church administrator Edward Enns has over the years developed a second career as translator. His latest contribution in limited edition hard cover 8½ x 11 format is *Elisabeth Reimer Teichroeb 1890–1978, Letters from Russia 1925–1978* (Winnipeg: Elizabeth & Edward Enns, 2004). Letters from 1925 to 1939 (172 pages) are from a dozen different family members. Those after the long silence (1940–1956) are from Elizabeth (437 pages), a keen observer and interesting writer. There is much in these letters about life in the USSR during this time.

Two slim volumes of inspirational biographical essays of Anabaptist and evangelical leaders have recently been published at the initiative of Günter Wieske and Heinrich Loewen jr. under the title *Sie folgten Jesus nach: Lebensbilder, die Mut machen*. Volume 1 (Bornheim/Bonn: PULS-Verlag GmbH, 1999) includes biographies of three 16<sup>th</sup> century Anabaptists (Felix Mantz, Balthasar Hubmaier and Menno Simons), the founder of the German Baptists (Johann Gerhard Oncken), British writers and preachers (John Bunyan, Charles H. Spurgeon), and American evangelist (Billy Graham). Volume 2 (2000) includes the Russian Mennonite writer, Jakob Kroeker, and American peace activist Martin Luther King.

Terrance Klassen, *Jacob M. Froese November 28, 1917 – June 14, 2003: A Photographic Tribute* (Winnipeg: by the author, 2004), 20 pages, coil bound. Rich in images and sparse in text, this tribute identifies many aspects of the family and public life of a significant leader from the ranks of southern Manitoba Mennonites. It should inspire a more complete biography of this son of an Old Colony church bishop who represented Mennonites in a wide array of Manitoba public life.

A few short pieces about Mennonite life in the early years of settlement in Manitoba by Eleanor Hildebrand

Chornoboy have appeared in anthologies since 2000. *Faspa: A Snack of Mennonite Stories* (Winnipeg: Interior Publishing and Communication, 2003) is her first book. In its 213 pages the author presents some 80 vignettes out of the lives of her extended Hildebrand and Sawatzky family in the Edenburg area as recalled by older clan members. While the stories are of specific incidents, they illustrate life as it was, from “Midwifery” and “Horse Medicine” to “Papa Can I Go Out” and “Wolf Whistles.” We can hope to see more stories in the future from this talented young teacher with a graduate degree in Family Studies.

A church anniversary provides a good occasion for historical reflection, gathering records of the past and writing an account of the story of the congregation and its community. Modern technology even makes publishing a history relatively inexpensive. Three prairie congregations did exactly that last year. Henry Goerzen and Paul I. Dyck collaborated on a 136-page centennial history of the *Bergthal Mennonite Church in Didsbury, Alberta*. (Didsbury: n.p., 2003). Tony Funk’s 9-page historical sketch, *Hague Mennonite Church: Celebrating 100 Years 1903-2003* (Hague, Saskatchewan: by the author, 2003), is a more modest but still a very valuable beginning. Marlene O. Martens, ed., *Returning Thanks to God: Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1928–2003* (n.p.: by the author, 2003) tells the stories of the Mayfair, Rabbit Lake and Glenbush communities of the Hoffnungsfelder Gemeinde. A drawback of anniversary booklets is that the celebration date sets a publishing deadline that invariably rushes the author-editor at the end, resulting in a not-quite-finished product. Nevertheless, all three modestly bound, desk-top produced histories have already benefited their congregations and will make a lasting contribution to future generations. Three other recent congregational histories offer further examples of how and when to write and publish the story of a church community. The Elim Mennonite Church of Grunthal, Manitoba, created a history book committee in anticipation of its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. *Our Walk with God: Jesus Christ the Cornerstone* (Grunthal: Elim Mennonite Church, 2002) is a 228-page, hard cover book, with substantial text, numerous photographs and some 20 pages of family tree information about the congregation’s

members.

Anne Harder, *The Vauxhall Mennonite Church*, edit by Judith Rempel (Calgary: Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, 2001), used the closing of the Vauxhall congregation as an occasion to record its history. While the modest 50-page booklet is coil bound, having an “arms-length” editor and publisher helps to avoid many of the slightly “unfinished” aspects of entirely self-published items.

The late John Friesen had substantially completed a manuscript of *The Glenlea Mennonite Church History* (edited by Nancy K. Vokey) when he passed away in 2002. He collected and translated both published and unpublished German materials and supplemented those texts with additional information from the congregation’s committee files and other records. John’s manuscript was “published” in 2002 (ca. 170 pages including photos) by posting it on the Glenlea Church website while Friesen family members continue to work

**Just received!** Heinrich Bergen, ed. *Chortitza Colony Atlas: Altkolonie, Mennonite Old Colony* (Saskatoon: Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, 2004), ca. 110 pages; German-English; 68 maps. \$35. Book note to follow in next issue.

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## Zurich in June 2004

(cont’d from p. 5)

have direct descendants of the Anabaptists with us,” Dettwiler said. “We hope this event can become a new beginning of ecumenical relations among our churches and congregations.”

*Kendra King is communications intern for Mennonite Church USA Executive Board Communications.*

### Editor’s note:

*The proportion of Canadians in the “up to 100” North American delegation would appropriately be up to 28 persons. Dan Nighswander of Winnipeg is planning to go as an official representative of Mennonite Church Canada and together with John Sharp will coordinate the list from Canada. He is requesting help in finding other Canadians who are going or should consider going. This should include the descendants of the various Anabaptist streams including Amish and Hutterites. If you plan to go or know of people going, please contact Dan Nighswander at 204-888-6781, or e-mail at: dnighswander@mennonitechurch.ca.*

A.R.

## Book Reviews

Mary A. Schiedel, editor. *Women Pastors in Ontario Mennonite Churches, 1973-2003* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora and Herald Press, 2003) 205 pp.

Reviewed by Irma Fast Dueck, Assistant Professor of Practical Theology, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg.

"The women pastors in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada are ordinary women who, 'by the power of God at work within them,' have done extraordinary things." So begins this inspiring collection of stories of Mennonite women pastors all responding in diverse ways to God's unpredictable call to ministry. In *Pioneers in Ministry* Mary Schiedel brings together the stories of twenty-four Ontario Mennonite women pastors, a small sample from a group of over forty Mennonite women pastors who have served in Ontario congregations for at least two years (not including youth pastors or chaplains). As can be imagined, the stories of these women are varied. Schiedel includes representative stories from women who were considered trailblazers and pioneers, women who served on ministry teams (sometimes with their husbands) and alone, and includes the stories of women pastors who continue to struggle to bring together mothering with ministry.

In some ways, the stories are not unique to women's experience and both women and men pastors will be able to identify with the issues raised. Discerning one's unique gifts for ministry, struggles with loneliness in the congregation, finding balance between church and family life, finding ways to sustain one's spiritual life amidst all the demands of ministry are issues that face many pastors, women and men. In other ways, the stories are clear that being women in ministry presents unique challenges. A number of these women pastors experienced much more resistance and pain and even hostility simply because they were women in ministry. The women who were pioneers and trailblazers had few, if any role models. Martha Smith Good writes, "when I entered the pastoral ministry there were no women I could look to and say, 'now there is someone I would like to pattern my ministry after'" (33). Without role models, these pioneer women pastors

managed to open the way for other women whose stories also follow in the book.

The stories of these women pastors also reflected a unique experience of God's call to ministry. Normally in discerning the call of God to pastoral ministry the call is described as needing both a personal and a corporate sense of calling. Many of the stories of these women pastors reflected a stronger sense of personal call to ministry in some ways to compensate for the weaker call of a community which did not recognize or acknowledge God's calling of women to pastoral ministry. As Mary Schiedel writes, this strong personal sense of call was "needed to give us courage to take first steps toward training for ministry, and to accept opportunities which opened up for us" (83).

Many of the stories of these women pastors reflect on the difficulty that women had in developing realistic appraisal of themselves as ministers. Doris Weber writes about her disappointment that her gender was "a block to both affirming and confronting" her (27). Women pastors experienced silence not only in encouraging them in their call to ministry but also silence in providing them with helpful feedback and guidance in the development of their ministry. On the other hand, frequently women spoke about the surprise they experienced when others recognized gifts for ministry within them, acknowledging that they themselves struggled to realistically appraise their gifts and their faithful use of them in the church.

My first experience ever with a woman in ministry was in Ontario in the early 1980s. I had come from Manitoba to study at the University of Waterloo. One Sunday morning, after having been in Kitchener-Waterloo for only a month, I attended worship at Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church. I was not being particularly attentive that Sunday morning until Mary Mae Schwartztruber went behind the pulpit and preached the sermon (and with no apologies for being a woman!). I stared in disbelief first at Mary Mae, and then at the people in the congregation wondering if any others shared the same shock I was experiencing. I'm not sure I heard a word she said but I know that my experience at Stirling opened my heart to hearing God's call in my life in a new way. Ontario Mennonite women pastors were not only trailblazers and pioneers in Ontario, but indeed for the

whole church. With thanksgiving we receive their stories as a testimony to God's ongoing work in the church which sometimes surprises us but most of all, gives us hope.

Edith Elisabeth Friesen. *Journey into Freedom: One Family's Real -Life Drama* (Winnipeg: Raduga Publications, 2003) 242 pp.

by Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg, MB

As Roy Loewen in the introduction notes, this author now "joins dozens of other writers who have presented accounts of suffering and redemption among the Mennonites of the Soviet Union". But it is far from just another book on the Russian Mennonite experience. That is to say, the telling of this story is, in various ways, unlike all the others - not only in its style of narration and creating portraiture for its characters, but in the way it evokes ethos for those who endured the journey themselves.

The book's subject family is that of the author's grandparents, Cornelius and Katharina (Klassen) Dyck of Rosenort and Halbstadt, Molotschna colony, respectively. They were married in 1923, and had five children, Anna (Anne in the story), Lydia, John, Martha, all born in the 1920s, in that order, and Cornelius (Cornusha), born not long after the father was first torn from the family in 1930 (he would escape, and then be taken again during the main Stalinist purges). Rosenort was the home of their young childhood days.

A generous portion of the family's photo album entries, included in the book, surveys the story in its own genre from the days of the author's great grandparents, Johann and Katharina Sawatzky Klassen, in 1895 (p.108), up to the reunion, as it were, of her mother with three uncles and aunts, i.e., Anne, Lydia, John and Martha, still around to gather in Langley, B.C. in 2002 ( p. 117).

The inimitable conversation Edith undertook with her family was drawn together in a series of interviews with Anne and her three siblings. By asking them all very similar questions the author could later integrate the comments of all four on a great variety of episodes brought together to describe their common experiences.

There was first the move to Einlage to  
(cont'd on p. 8)