

Mennonite Historian

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



Tree planting on Vancouver Island after fire-damaged trees (snags) have been cut.

Credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre 583:4, David T. Wall collection.

Four Options: Young Mennonite men in Second World War

by Jim Bowman

(From 1987 to 1995, Henry Goerzen recorded the stories of 41 Alberta Mennonite men, who were of an age to serve in the Canadian military during the Second World War. In the interviews, these men speak of the ways they chose to serve their country during wartime. In 2011, Goerzen donated the summarized stories and related materials to the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Archive. Most of the stories were published in 1998.¹ In this article, MHSA archivist Jim Bowman tells four stories from the Goerzen collection that were not published. Ed.)

The story of Alberta's Mennonite conscientious objectors (COs) is not as straightforward as I thought it would be. Canadian legislation regarding exemption from military duty differed from time to time, and the different branches of the historic peace churches had different interpretations of the meaning of pacifism as an article of faith.

In Canada, the *Militia Act* of 1793 exempted Mennonites, Brethren in Christ, and Quakers from military service, although they were required to pay a special tax of 20 shillings annually in peacetime, or 4 pounds during wartime, in lieu of service. By 1849, they were unconditionally excused from military service and taxation. In 1873, Mennonite

immigrants from Russia were specifically promised complete exemption, at a time when the Dominion government wanted to populate Manitoba with industrious farmers. Exemptions were later specifically granted to the Doukhobors, who migrated from Russia in 1898, and to the Hutterian Brethren, many of whom were refugees from the United States during the First World War.²

The Mennonites who fled the Soviet Union in the 1920s were not among the groups specifically exempt from military service. The *National War Service Regulations* under the *National Resources Mobilization Act* (1940) gave the government power to conscript COs who

(cont'd on p. 2)

Peace—The Exhibition

by Conrad Stoesz

Military tanks surrounded those gathered. Every way they looked, there was a barrel, a gun. In this great hall, dignitaries and members of the public mixed to view *Peace—The Exhibition* at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

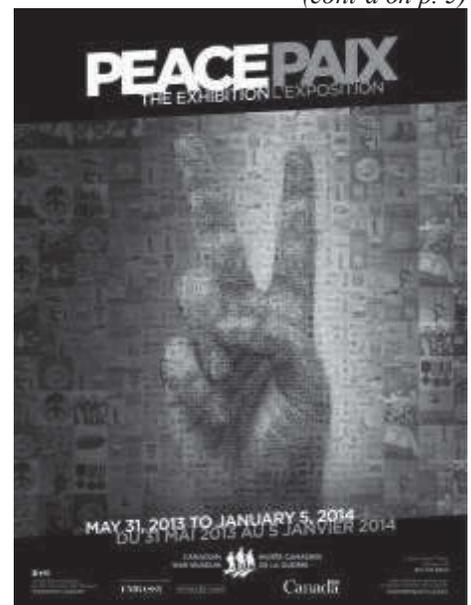
At first, it seemed incongruous to me that there would be an exhibit about peace in a war museum. But upon further reflection, it became clear to me that while people disagree on the pathways to peace, peace really is what most want, not war.

As I walked through the display that opened on May 30, 2013, I entered a unique space that gives voice to the many different ways that Canadians have worked for peace. The souvenir catalogue claims that this “is the first major exhibition to explore the many ways Canadians have acted for peace.” Visitors are encouraged “to add their own voices.”

The exhibit delineated three main areas: Negotiation, Organization, and Intervention. Each was generously illustrated with photos, film clips, artifacts, and quotes. There was space to draw a picture, listen to a wide variety of peace songs, or create a peace ribbon. The curators also assembled a “Human Library” of peace stories.

Canada's contributions in Haiti after the devastating 2010 earthquake, through to the origins of the Aboriginal Six Nations confederacy are described. There are stories from Prime Minister Lester Pearson's Nobel Peace Prize, the dog tags of Renée Filiatraut, a former diplomat in Afghanistan, and Americans dodging the

(cont'd on p. 5)



Poster for *Peace--The Exhibition*

Four options

(cont'd from p. 1)

would be assigned non-combatant duties within the armed forces. There was some disunity among the various branches of the Mennonite faith on how to respond to this legislation. There were many who objected to being inducted into the armed forces and being trained alongside combatants. A committee of church leaders, including David Toews, B.B. Janz, and S.F. Coffman, met several times to develop a unified response and lobby the government. They succeeded in negotiating the right for COs to perform alternative service in civilian-supervised work camps beginning in May 1941.

Most of the alternative service workers were employed in national parks, forestry, and road building. Toward the end of the war, approved work was expanded to include service in agriculture, firefighting, hospitals, and certain strategic manufacturing industries. By December 1945, there were 10,831 men with CO status in Canada.³ About 63% were Mennonites, and others included Hutterites, Doukhobors, Brethren in Christ, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, Seventh-Day Adventists, Quakers, and United Church members.⁴

Application for CO status was a stressful experience. The applicant first had to fill out a four-page form explaining his religious beliefs, who his religious

Mennonite Historian is published by the Mennonite Heritage Centre of Mennonite Church Canada and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.

Editors: Jon Isaak (CMBS)
Conrad Stoesz (CMBS/MHC)
Associate Editor: Corey Dyck (MHC)
Layout: Alf Redekopp

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

1310 Taylor Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3M 3Z6
P: 204-669-6575
E: jisaak@mbconf.ca

or
600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4
P: 204-888-6781

E: cstoesz@mennonitechurch.ca
www.mennonitehistorian.ca

Subscription rates: \$15.00 per year, \$28.00 for two years, \$40.00 for three years. Individual subscriptions may be ordered from these addresses.

ISSN 07008066

mentors were, and why he wished to avoid military service. Then he was summoned to appear before a special court in a nearby courthouse or other public building. He was allowed to be accompanied by his father or pastor for moral support, and sometimes the judges were sympathetic. But often the judges held the view that the objector was unpatriotic or a shirker, and did their best to persuade him that it was in his best interest to enlist.

Not all Mennonite men applied for CO status. There were some who examined their consciences and decided that it was ethical to go to war as combatants. And there were some who simply were attracted to the adventure, the smart-looking uniforms, the pay, or the opportunity to learn a trade.

In Canada, there were some 260,000 men who applied for a postponement of military service. Some needed to stay at home to support dependent family members. Many worked in industries of strategic importance to the war effort. Agricultural production was of major importance, and about 90% of western Canadian Mennonites lived on farms. However, the government was unlikely to grant a postponement to a young man whose parents were able to manage the family farm. There were many Mennonite men who would have been eligible for a postponement, yet applied for CO status as a matter of principle.⁵

By 1941, young Mennonite men essentially had four options: to volunteer for *combatant duty*; to seek a *postponement*; to declare Conscientious Objector status and be assigned to *non-combatant service*; or to declare Conscientious Objector status and apply for *alternative service*. Henry Goerzen's collection includes summaries of the stories of young men who chose each of those alternatives.

Peter Wiens of Tofield volunteered for military service. He served in the Artillery, as an interpreter, in the military police, and as an undercover police agent. "There were many challenges and risks and some of the work was not pretty—but it had to be done. It meant carrying a gun and the possible use of it."

His motivations for participating as a combatant were paraphrased by Henry Goerzen:

The matter of "good conscience" was important . . . Peter saw the issue to be that of national and international policing. [He]

may well have been influenced by his father who had been involved in the policing of and about the villages in Russia, establishing and maintaining order as understood by the community. Therefore, good conscience needed to be placed in a broader context wherein he saw the Mennonites clearly as beneficiaries of that law and order system. Therefore, the CO option during the war was not considered right or of good conscience. It was opting out of some very uncomfortable duty.

In regard to his personal decision to participate in active service with all the risks, he says, "There is a price to pay for good daily living, protection and a show of appreciation in addition to the need of policing . . . Never forget when the good Lord calls you to that task."

After the war, Peter married Gisela Brauer of Wilhelmshaavn, West Germany. They lived on the Niagara Peninsula, where Peter worked in fishing on Lake Ontario, then in the steel industry. After some 20 years, they moved to Langley, BC, for health reasons. He was a member of a Mennonite church in St. Catharines, but his church participation lapsed to some extent, "partly because of a lack of acceptance of his position."⁶

Jacob Hiebert was born in 1919 in Reinfeld, Manitoba. His family members were Bergthal Mennonites, and at the age of 24 or 25, he was received as a member of the local Bergthal church. In his late teens, he worked on his family farm in the summers and in coal mining at Estevan, Saskatchewan. He worked for the M & S (Manitoba and Saskatchewan) Mines on a seam that was 90 feet below the surface and was 6 or 7 feet thick, with no explosive gases.

In 1940, as the war progressed, the elders of Jake's church vouched for his CO status, but because coal mining was essential for the war effort, he was never personally called upon to defend his pacifist position. He received a postponement of military service, rather than a CO classification. An advantage of postponement was that he wasn't required to donate \$15.00 monthly from his salary to the Red Cross. He did do a stint of construction work during the summer of 1942 in Prince Rupert, which was then an important supply depot for the Pacific Theatre.

The M & S Mine closed in 1948, and Jake soon found another job at the Star Mine in Drumheller. But the underground coal mining industry was in rapid decline, and that mine also closed in 1953. In

(cont'd on p. 8)

Genealogy and Family History

Alfred P. Stoesz (1899–1955)

by Conrad Stoesz

Whatever happened to Alfred? This has been a long standing question in the extended Stoesz family. An obituary in a Russian medical journal from 1956 shines new light on the professional life of Dr. Alfred Peter Stoesz (Mar 18, 1899–Nov 18, 1955).¹ But it also raises new questions and leaves many others unanswered. The last piece of information that the Stoesz family in Canada had is dated 1930. At that time, Alfred expressed interest in coming to North America with his wife and son, but finances and learning a new language were large barriers.



From the obituary, we now know that A.P. Stoesz (A.П. Шреца or A.P. Shtess) cobbled together enough funds to put himself through medical school and became a psychiatrist. His doctoral dissertation explored brain injury. Later, he found work at the Saratov University Hospital, studying nervous diseases. In 1925, he undertook a study of lesbianism. After 17 sessions of psychoanalysis and hypnotherapy, he claimed to have cured Aleksandr Pavlovich of her same-sex attraction and her addiction to cigarettes. His findings were published in 1925.²

From Saratov, Alfred moved north to be the first psychiatrist to work in the northern Yakutia area. In 1927, he published an article on mental illness in the region.³ He was the head of the psychiatric department in Yakutia until 1928. His professional record resumes again in 1931, when he is employed by the Soviet army until 1936, as the chair for nervous diseases at the medical institute at the military medical academy in Kuibyshev (now known as Samara). In 1936, he published an important study on incontinence.

Over his career, Alfred wrote over 40 important scientific works and supervised 3 doctoral students. One his students, Ilesheva Razaliya Galieva, became the first woman to become a professor of psychiatry and was still practicing in

2009.⁴ During World War Two, he worked as a consultant at a number of military hospitals. In 1947, Alfred was appointed head of the psychiatric department at the Kazakhstan National Medical University, a position he retained until his death in 1955.

It appears that Stoesz was a collaborator in the “politics of medicine” in the last years of Stalin’s rule. A.P. Stoesz made a presentation at the 1951 Pavlov session in Moscow. He was one of the few leaders from outside Moscow to attend the open sessions as well as the closed sessions. This event was designed to impose Pavlovian dogma on the profession and lobby for more resources, especially for the treatment of war veterans.⁵

In 1953, Stoesz was instrumental in organizing the first psychiatry conference in Ksyl-Orda.⁶ The obituary goes on to say that Alfred was a good lecturer, “a decent hard-working person with high self-discipline.”

The obituary, however, says nothing about his wife or son, referenced in family sources.⁷ Not surprisingly, the obituary also says nothing about his German-Mennonite upbringing. Also absent are the reasons for his moves to remote locations such as Yukutia and Kazakhstan, where many Mennonites and others deemed to be threats to the state were deported. It is significant that Alfred was able to remain working in his field, when so many other professionals were removed from their positions. These missing pieces remain a mystery.

While new documents shed significant light on the professional life of Alfred Stoesz, his family of origin remains unclear. Certain family sources have long claimed that Alfred Peter Stoesz was the son of Peter Stoesz (Jun 11, 1838–1908).⁸ However, others have called this into question.⁹

Peter Stoesz married and had daughters Kathe, Alma, Maria, and a son, named Johann Alfred, according to A.D. Stoesz’s book, *A Stoesz Genealogy*. After Peter’s wife died (her name is not known), he married Auguste Klassen (Mar 13, 1863–Jan 15, 1922). This was to be Auguste’s third of four marriages. She and Peter had no children. Auguste’s first marriage was to Abraham Claassen (b. Aug 11, 1859) in 1882. They had three children Johan (b. Dec 4, 1887), Rudolf (Feb 2, 1893–Aug 8,

1953), and Justine (b. Jul 22, 1894). Rudolf immigrated to Canada in 1925 and worked as a medical doctor at the Concordia Hospital in Winnipeg.

After Abraham’s death, Auguste married businessman Jacob Stoesz (b. Jun 5, 1853) of Elbing, Prussia.¹⁰ They are believed to have had a son, Jacob Alfred Stoesz. After Jacob Stoesz died, Auguste married Peter Stoesz. After Peter’s death in 1908, she married Jacob Wieler in 1915.

So, who is Alfred’s father? Peter or Jacob? Both Peter Stoesz and Jacob Stoesz were at one time married to Auguste. Both Peter and Jacob had sons with the middle name Alfred; although Auguste was the mother of Jacob’s son, Alfred, not Peter’s. According to the obituary, Alfred was born in 1899. If Peter were Alfred’s father, Peter would have been 61 years old at Alfred’s birth. If Jacob were Alfred’s father, Jacob would have been 46 years old at Alfred’s birth, an age that initially seems more plausible. However, Alfred went by the name Alfred Peter Stoesz or A.P. Stoesz, suggesting Peter was his father. Or is there another explanation?

If you have any information about Dr. Alfred Stoesz, please contact Conrad Stoesz at cstoesz@mbconf.ca.

Endnotes

1. Obituary in the Journal for Neuropathology and Psychiatry, *Zh Nevropatol Psikhiatr im SS Korsakova* 56 (1956): 200. Translated by Naemi Fast.
2. Dan Healey, *Homosexual desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 67, 374.
3. “Dushevnye zabolevaniia v Iakutti”, *Zhurnal nevropatologii I psikhiiatrii imeni s.s. Korsakova*, 1927. Correspondence from Dan Healey to Conrad Stoesz, Jan 13, 2011.
4. <http://zs.808.kz/?p=3258> accessed Jan 12, 2011. 5
5. Correspondence from Dan Healey to Conrad Stoesz, Jan 18, 2011.
6. Correspondence from Naemi Fast to Conrad Stoesz, Aug 3, 2010.
7. A.D. Stoesz, *A Stoesz Genealogy* (Lincoln, Nebraska: A.D. Stoesz, 1972), 25.
8. See Stoesz, *A Stoesz Genealogy*; and *Our Stoesz Heritage 1836-1987* (Altona, Manitoba: 1987).
9. Correspondence from Hilda Heidebrecht to Conrad Stoesz, Aug 3, 2010. See also GRANDMA database version 7.04, Auguste Claassen # 374299 and Peter Stoesz #69120.
10. James Shaw, trans., *Elbing–Ellerwald West Prussia Church book 1788–1880* (Hutchinson, Kansas: 2005), 46.

German Baptists and Mennonite Brethren in South Russia

by Johann E. Pritzkau (1842–1924)

(Mennonite Brethren historians have regularly pointed out the many things that the MB renewal movement in Russia borrowed from the German Baptists—immersion baptism, congregational polity, conference structure, and mission mindset. However, Pritzkau's 1914 German Baptist history—translated by Walter Regher and to be published later this year—shows that the “borrowing” was not all one way. Converts from Lutheran and Catholic German villages credit the evangelistic work of early MBs for their introduction to the believers church tradition. And yet Pritzkau points out some of the more embarrassing aspects of early MB praxis: namely, how MBs felt they could not absorb the converts into MB churches—even though the converts dearly wanted to become MB—for fear that the MB church would lose the privileges they enjoyed from the Russian government, i.e., exemption from military combat duty. Thus, the converts were encouraged to join the German Baptist Church. The following is an excerpt from Pritzkau's history. Ed.)

The Michailovka community [near the Friedensfeld Mennonite settlement, Ekatorinsolav Province, Ukraine] was situated on an estate owned by Grand Duke Michael. The name was given to their village by the leaseholders in honor of their princely Lord. There were, in fact, many other German villages on this extensive estate bearing other names, but Michailovka was the church center of a large and courageous Baptist Church which, with few exceptions, consisted of German citizens, and still does today [1908], though most have returned to Germany.

These Germans had settled in leased-land colonies near to or among the colonists on crown land, occupied primarily by Mennonites; and thus had made contact with one another. Through the spiritual movements and revivals with which the dear Lord had visited this region at that time, many found through them, in this supposedly wild Russia, the pearl of great price that had remained hidden from them in Lutheran Germany. This circumstance brought even more Germans to Russia. Later, it attracted those who were already believers and members of Baptist churches in Germany. Many of these had served there as deacons and as co-workers in the gospel and could immediately assist in the nurturing of the new work.

In the beginning, the two confessions—the Mennonites and the Baptists—were bound together as children in one home.



Johann E. Pritzkau (1842–1924)

They participated jointly in the furthering of the kingdom of God, saw themselves as members of one church, and celebrated the Lord's Supper together. The newly converted were accepted and baptized without distinction, and when ministers of the Mennonite Church, as for example Bro. Unger or others came, they were welcomed as their own Elders. Likewise, when ministers from our churches went to them, they were treated with the same brotherly respect.

After all, there existed no valid reason why this should not have been so. Did they not confess one Lord, one faith, and one baptism? Had they not all come to a true conversion of the heart through the same motivation and the same gospel? Through the same experience, they had recognized the most important thing regarding salvation, which is the new birth from God. Did they not agree in the fundamental doctrines, such as the new birth, justification by faith through the atonement of Christ the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world? In the doctrine of sanctification, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, they were one and cultivated precious brotherly fellowship together.

The prevailing differences, the swearing of oaths, foot-washing, and nonresistance, were viewed as peripheral during this time, as the worship of God in spirit and in truth moved to the foreground. The Mennonite Brethren did not take offense that the Baptists held varying views and had varying explanations, nor did the Baptists see any reason for separation, when individual Mennonite Brethren insisted upon foot-washing combined with the Lord's Supper. In a word, in the beginning, the Baptists and the Mennonite

Brethren saw themselves as members of the same church.

It did not, however, remain this way. The occasion for the separation was the Mennonite nonresistance *Privilegiumsrecht* [privilege of exemption from military service on account of views on nonresistance]. It was not that their views on this issue differed so starkly that, for the sake of conscience, the two groups could not have remained one fellowship.

In fact, the Mennonite Brethren themselves were not united on the issue; they were divided into three camps. One party was of the opinion that they must stand firm on this issue with the same consistency as had their forebears. They committed themselves to passing on of this recognized truth, not only to their descendants, but also to others who might wish to join them as Mennonites, insisting that they should be in agreement with them on the teaching of nonresistance, and be prepared to accept the consequences.

The other party was of a totally opposite opinion. Their advice was to remain within the framework of the *Privilegiums* and to declare themselves to the government as Mennonite, establishing no new confession, but rather following the principles of their forebears with greater zeal and thoroughness. Should they be threatened with the loss of military service exemption, they would rather totally sever their connection with the Baptists and turn away from them.

The third party shared the views of the Baptists on the military issue. They were in agreement with the Baptist Confession of Faith. While they, as all true Christians, did not want war, they did on the other hand, recognize that humanity cannot survive without government and that government cannot survive without the military.

These varying views regarding this question gave us cause to search the Word of God relative to this issue. At the time, we German colonists had exactly the same rights as did the Mennonites, even without the confessional position to which the Mennonites held. Before we had contact with them, we had not concerned ourselves about the issue. Now, however, we were prompted to do so. Together we searched the Scriptures in order to find clarity. With the third party, we came to the conviction that the article on military service in the Baptist Confession of Faith is based on the Holy Scriptures. . . .

Had the privilege of exemption from military service not included the condition that only their own descendants could be accepted into their fellowship, then the Mennonite Brethren and the Baptists would to this day still be one church.

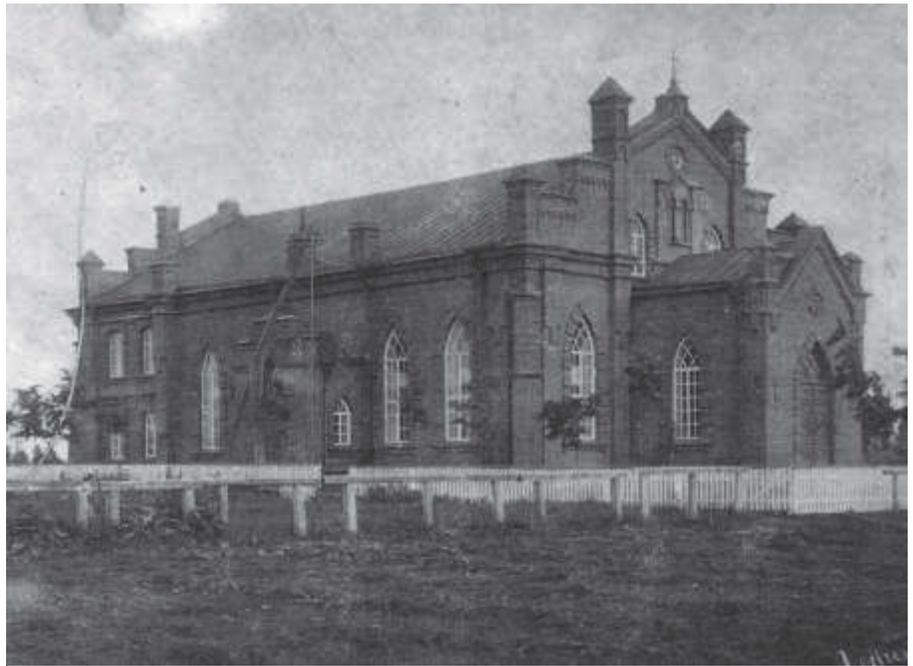
In spiritual matters we still are one, though naturally, for a separation to take place there had to be formal consent from both sides. The Mennonite Brethren could not remain in one fellowship with us, unless they relinquished their legal rights. This they did not want to do, nor did the Baptists require it of them. Once they had the right to exemption from military service, for which their forebears had paid dearly, we did not take offense at their desire to preserve it for themselves, despite the fact that we did not find it scriptural. We agreed that it was best for those from other confessions, whom they baptized, to affiliate with the Baptists. Thus it was that alongside the Friedensfeld Mennonite Brethren Church, the Michailovka Baptist Church came into being. It was founded in the year 1885 under the leadership of Bro. August Liebig. . . .

Peace—The Exhibition

(cont'd from p. 1)
draft to the Vietnam War.

The display highlights the complexity of conflict with quotations and items that often seemed opposed to each other. Contributions by historic peace church members can be found throughout the display. The Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg supplied the boots worn by Elmon Lichti, a WWII conscientious objector, and WWI exemption cards from David M. Stoesz and Wilhelm Falk. Other items include the iconic Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) pin “To remember is to work for peace,” a recording of the song “We are People of God’s Peace” by a Canadian Mennonite University group, and an MCC relief kit.

For me, I never dreamed that the story of my grandfather—a conscientious objector to war—would someday be used by the Canadian War Museum. In my experience of telling the story of Canada’s conscientious objectors, I have encountered open animosity. I have been told, “If that’s what you believe, you do not belong in this country.” By featuring peace advocates, *Peace—The Exhibition* allows for more than one narrative, more than one way to be Canadian. For my Mennonite people, who were once



Neudorf (Volhynia, Ukraine) German Baptist Church, constructed in 1907. Photo from Don Miller.

disenfranchised for their beliefs and considered outside the national norm (even incompatible with Canadian values), to be recognized and featured in this display is huge.

This display was a long time in the making. Curator and assistant historian, Amber Lloydlangston, attended the *War and the Conscientious Objector* conference held at the University of Winnipeg in 2006. She continued to build relationships, inviting people to contribute to the display. Add in a labor dispute and a need to re-imagine the display, one can only be impressed with the perseverance Dr. Lloydlangston has demonstrated in bringing this display to fruition.

Peace—The Exhibition sits within a larger context of the War Museum. Entering the permanent display is a description of war. It states that “virtually every human society, past and present, makes war.” The following “theatres” impress upon the visitor the triumphal sacrifice of the Canadian soldiers through various armed conflicts. In other words, war is natural—everyone does it and this is how Canadians do it. In contrast, *Peace—The Exhibition*, a temporary exhibit, focuses on actions of Canadians who negotiated, organized, and intervened to reduce conflict.

The message I took away from the exhibit was that working for peace is a Canadian value. However, the focus of the display left me feeling that peace is achieved primarily through armed conflict. Considering its context—a

museum dedicated to the exploration of war—the peace exhibit opens up a several new pathways for discussion. However, I still felt the story was not complete, and could have been told differently.

Other reviewers have suggested several ways to improve the peace exhibit. For example, there could be displays detailing the work of restorative justice programs, conflict transformation studies, and a comparison of the monetary costs of war vs. the costs for providing education, adequate housing, clean water, healthcare, and food. Additional topics worthy of inclusion are: activism that has lobbied for a world without war, lessons and stories from peace activists that provide an alternative to the fight or flight paradigm, and the list could go on.

So that leads me to ask, where do we explore some of these other avenues of peacemaking? Where do we highlight peacemaking that inspires creative ideas and methods for addressing conflict? What am I, what are you, doing to promote peace where you are? What would it take to have a Peace Museum with a temporary exhibit on War?



A photo from *Peace—The Exhibition*.



**Mennonite
Heritage
Centre**

600 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4

New Director arrives

by *Korey Dyck*

“This is Alf 2.0”; that’s how I was introduced to Mennonite Church Canada staff in mid-July. A fun introduction; it implies a new and improved version of Alf Redekopp, the previous director at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives and Gallery. Those are high expectations indeed! It is my hope that I can continue the work Alf started and add to it. Having sat in his chair the last three weeks, Alf and the work/ministry he did will be hard to replace.



Korey Dyck, new MHC director

Fortunately, the staff at the MHC Archives and Gallery has made me feel very welcome. Connie Wiebe, the Centre’s administrative assistant, told me at our first meeting that she remembers me from when I was a student at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC). Needless to say, she has an incredible memory! The archivist, Conrad Stoesz, has also made my transition quite easy. Conrad is an old friend and former classmate from CMBC. And I first met Ray Dirks, the curator of the Gallery, two weeks later due to his tight painting schedule. Ray also made me feel like the MHC would be a good place to work. I am continually grateful for the relaxed and friendly atmosphere they create, as I “find my feet” at the Centre.

Page 6 September 2013 Mennonite Historian

I arrive at the Centre through a non-traditional route. I am not an archivist or historian by training. I do, however, have an abiding interest in the “Mennonite Story,” an ongoing story of a particular group of Christians—how they fail and succeed, suffer and celebrate, sin and are reconciled to God and their neighbours. I have learned this story through courses in high school and college, church and seminary, and through the stories shared around the supper table. It is a story I know from textbooks and through personal family history. It is this ongoing collection of stories that I now have the privilege of collecting, recording, preserving, and most importantly sharing with future generations through the ministry of Mennonite Church Canada, and especially through the Mennonite Heritage Centre. I look forward to building relationships with the various Mennonite denominations, congregations, and groups that already relate to the Centre. There is room for everyone’s stories at the MHC.

More formally, I hold BA degrees in both theology and arts, with majors in conflict resolution studies and sociology. My MA degree is in peace studies, with additional graduate work conducted in Dublin, Ireland. I would describe myself as a “blue-collar academic,” with a heart for the church. With a host of work-related transferable skills, I believe that my new role at the MHC will be a good fit for both me and the Centre. There are certainly enough interesting people and projects that come to the Centre every day to keep me engaged and occupied!

Within the next few months, Connie and Conrad will teach me how the archives work and how best to help others find the resources they need. I am looking forward to becoming familiar with the archives and its holdings, while keeping an eye out for records that support my research interests. Stories from my family’s history fascinate me and lead me to ask: What did it mean to be landless in the Ukraine? Who was the Smucker family from Ohio that supported my grandmother, my father, and his siblings in Paraguay? Why did my maternal grandfather move from Plum Coulee, Manitoba, to Hague, Saskatchewan? What were the “traditional” inheritance practices of Mennonite families? What were the factors involved with denying “war widows” their pensions post-WW2 in Volendam, Paraguay? And more broadly,

(cont’d on p. 8)

Alf Redekopp retires

by *Conrad Stoesz*

After 26 years of service, the last 13 as Director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Alf Redekopp announced his retirement. Alf has played an important role in the development and success of the Mennonite Heritage Centre. He ushered in a new era for archives, not only for Mennonite Church Canada, but also in the development of archives in the larger Mennonite community.



Alf Redekopp. Photo by Conrad Stoesz.

Alf first started working with archival collections in 1987 at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. He was instrumental in the creation of the first website and email address for the Centre in 1996. He was involved in providing technical support for an indexing project on an early IBM computer using database software. The first index of *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* was published in 1990.

Alf became an active member of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, helping to create a genealogical database. He was also treasurer for a number of years and a key board member. Alf played an important role in the development of the Global Anabaptist Encyclopedia Online project (www.gameo.org). He continues to serve on the executive of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada.

Alf’s contributions reach beyond the Mennonite archival centres with his early involvement with the Association for

(cont’d on p. 9)

CMBS page

by Jon Isaak

Book Launch

Sixty people gathered at the Centre for MB Studies on June 7, 2013, to hear Maureen Klassen describe the stunning discovery of a family secret and the steady assurance of God's presence through the horrors of Stalin's purges. The event was the launch of Maureen's book, *It Happened in Moscow*. In her memoir, Maureen traces her encounters with two remarkable women, Mary Brieger Klassen (the wife of C.F. Klassen) and Erika Reimer Gurieva (her husband Herb's half-sister). See book review by Peter Letkemann in this issue (p. 10). The book was sponsored by the Historical Commission of U.S. and Canadian Mennonite Brethren Churches. Copies of the book are available at www.kindredproductions.com (ISBN 978-1-894791-35-9, 240 pp., \$21.95, paper).

Archival Intern



Amanda Bartel. Photo by Ellen Paulley.

Amanda Bartel of Iowa City, Iowa, was this summer's archival intern. The five-week internship, sponsored by the MB Historical Commission, took Amanda to four archives, in four different geographical locations, in two countries. She spent a week at each of the four MB archives in North America: the Centers for MB Studies in both Hillsboro, Kan., and Fresno, Calif., the Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia in Abbotsford, B.C., and two weeks at the Centre for MB Studies in Winnipeg, Man. Amanda restored papers, some covered in mould; sorted and organized donated documents; updated a visual inventory;



Maureen Klassen. Photo by Kate Woltmann.

and inputted data into archival systems. For her particular project, she chose to research the lives and ministry of two early MB missionaries, Jacobena (Bena) Bartel (1892–1972) and Emma Bartel (1887–1958), who happened to be her great aunts! The MB Historical Commission will be hosting the internship again next summer. Included in the internship are travel, accommodations, and a \$2,000 stipend. See www.mbhistory.org for application details.

KFW Research Grant

Christine Kampen and Dorothy Peters were awarded the Katie Funk Wiebe Research grant. At the annual meeting of the MB Historical Commission in June



Christine Kampen



2013, the Commission selected the project proposal co-authored by Kampen and Peters. Their project studies the history of the Christian spiritual formation of two Mennonite Brethren (MB) women, one serving as a co-pastor in an MB church (Kampen, Highland Community Church, Abbotsford, BC) and the other a writer and professor of Biblical Studies (Peters, Trinity Western University, Langley, BC). The project title is: *From Generation to Generation: The History and Transmission of the Spiritual Formation of Two Granddaughters*. The study will combine oral interviews, analysis of contextual factors, and theological reflection on the process of writing a "history of spiritual formation" as MB women leaders. The \$1,500 research grant is made possible with support from the Katie Funk Wiebe fund. The MB Historical Commission will offer the KFW research grant again next year. See www.mbhistory.org for application details.



Dorothy Peters

Four Options

(cont'd from p. 2)

1949, he married Aggie Rempel, a member of a Sommerfelder congregation near his home village. For the rest of his working life, he hauled gravel in Brooks, farmed in Swift Current, worked as a mechanic, and drove a school bus.⁷

Cornie Thiessen of Coaldale initially worked in alternate service, at Camp Q7 near Vedder Crossing, BC, cutting timber for domestic firewood. After nearly two years of this, he sought to enlist with the Medical Corps, for two reasons: he was interested in learning first aid as a trade; and he felt a calling from God that he should do something to ease the amount of suffering caused by the war.

Cornie was immediately shipped to Peterborough, Ontario, where the basic training camp for the Medical Corps was located. The men were quickly subjected to a punishing regimen: 15-mile marches at 5 miles per hour; obstacle courses; jumping off high scaffolds; carrying a stretcher while in a crouched position; and “walking” suspended by the hands along a taut rope. “Those of us who were hardier were at an advantage to many city boys,” he commented wryly. “Another aspect of the training was that of absolute obedience and becoming very disciplined.” Any violation of rules, tardiness, or misdemeanor was met with punishment, such as menial labour or cancellation of weekend leaves. After Peterborough, there was another stint at Camp Borden, Ontario, for a six-week course as a nurses’ orderly. In spite of the harshness of training, Cornie felt that the recruits were treated with respect.

Cornie’s unit shipped out from Halifax on February 9, 1945, and landed in Scotland. At Aldershot, England, there was yet more training specific to the role of the medic. “Bombing simulations were enacted, and things like treatment for shock, bandaging, relieving of pain were lectured on or practiced.”

Then it was off to the war zone, by boat to France, through Belgium, then close to the firing line in the Netherlands. With only a few months left in the war, the Canadian medical officers took over the management of former German military and civilian hospitals. Cornie’s ability to translate German was highly valued.

As the war in Europe came to an end, Cornie observed that “there was hardly any show of animosity between the German enemy and the conquering British and Americans—everyone was basking in

this peace news.” By Christmas 1945, he was in Oldenburg, Germany, befriending families and organizing youth clubs. By then, his efforts were supported by a Mennonite Central Committee representative in the area. He admits that his faith was a bit shaken. “With so much suffering, I wondered if God was still in control.” But he was satisfied that he had fulfilled his original purpose—to alleviate suffering.

Cornie returned to Alberta and married his fiancée Tina Unger. They were in Tofield in 1993 when this interview was conducted.⁸

Jake Willms of Coaldale had a card signed by his pastor indicating his church membership, and when called to the court hearing, he was granted CO status without difficulty. He was interested in serving in the Medical Corps, but according to the judge, there were no openings in it at the time. The men from Coaldale were all shipped out at once via Greyhound bus to Jasper Camp I.

The camp consisted of a mess hall, supply room, wash house, and crowded tents pitched over wood frames for sleeping. Jake felt that much of the work at Jasper was deliberately designed to humiliate the COs—for example, using picks and shovels to build a road grade, when there was a caterpillar tractor nearby.

After four months in Jasper, Jake was sent to Green Timbers Forest Reserve in Surrey, BC, a distribution point, and then to a camp near Ladysmith on Vancouver Island. There he was engaged in firefighting and reforestation—tree planting and cutting snags. Toward the end of the war, he was transferred to Whitecourt, Alberta, producing railway ties and timbers. In the spring, he returned to his home farm and assisted in its operation. His family made monthly payments to the Red Cross during this period.

Aside from the Jasper experience, Jake had fond memories of his camp experiences. He thought that management was generally good. He liked the security and predictability of camp life. He enjoyed being close to nature, and having the opportunity to go swimming in the ocean was an adventure for a Prairie boy. He had occasional opportunities to go to Vancouver or Abbotsford to visit relatives, attend church, and socialize with other Mennonite young people. Mennonite pastors often visited the camps, and there was plenty of

opportunity to debate religious ideas with the Seventh-Day Adventists, Doukhobors, United Church members, and others.⁹

The Second World War was a time of sacrifice for everyone, but especially so for pacifists. For Mennonite young men, whether they decided to enlist as combatants, apply for postponements of service, enlist in non-combatant service, or seek alternative service, there were times of fear, hardship, inconvenience, and danger. But there were also positive aspects: opportunities to travel, to get to know people from other than their home communities, and to be exposed to new ideas.

Endnotes

1. A.J. Klassen, ed., *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II* (Abbotsford, BC: Mennonite Central Committee, 1998).
2. *Alternative Service in the Second World War: Conscientious Objectors in Canada, 1939-1945*, www.alternativeservice.ca, retrieved 30 April 2013. This award-winning site, containing material suitable for school curricula and enhanced by scans of archival documents and news clippings, was created by the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg (ca. 2004) and is maintained by Conrad Stoesz.
3. *Alternative Service in the Second World War*.
4. “Conscientious objector”, *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscientious_objector, retrieved 17 April, 2013; *Alternative Service in the Second World War*.
5. *Alternative Service in the Second World War*.
6. Henry Goerzen’s collection, file 1-1, p. 11.
7. Henry Goerzen’s collection, file 1-11.
8. Henry Goerzen’s collection, file 1-1, p. 51.
9. Henry Goerzen’s collection, file 1-1, p. 58.

This article first appeared in the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Newsletter, Vol XVI, No. 2 (June 2013), 15–18 and is reprinted here with permission.

New MHC director

(cont'd from p. 6)

how far back can I trace the Dyck family name? I hope that by researching my personal interests, I will be better equipped to help others find the material they are looking for.

I was also asked to say a few words about my vision for the archives. This, I think might be a bit premature, after such a short time on the job. However, it is clear to me already that the MHC is the pre-eminent research centre for Prussian/Russian Mennonite history with a first-class staff. It is also clear that we need to work at publicizing all the good work and projects we are involved in. We

also need to ask others to join us in helping share these stories of faith to remind and inspire present and future generations. We need volunteers to help us make these stories accessible. We need to repair a building that requires our immediate attention. We need more space for present and future growth of the archives. And we need to aggressively go after family papers, diaries, and photo collections, as well as thematic collections on music, business history, and so on, before these stories are lost for future generations. In short, we have much work to do. In the next few months, we will begin to work diligently at telling our own story of how the MHC Archives and Gallery can help shape the ongoing story of the Mennonite Church. It is a story that requires telling over and over again.

Redekopp Retires

(cont'd from p. 6)

Manitoba Archives. He went on to become an important member of the board and chair of the finance and grants committee for several years. For a time, he acted as the webmaster for the Association's website.

In 1994, Alf transitioned from teaching at Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute to begin working at the Mennonite Heritage Centre. Here he was instrumental in bringing in a new era of archival development. With the power of computers and the vast amounts of data they could store and sort, new descriptive standards came into place across the country. RAD—Rules for Archival Description—became a buzz word in the archival community. This standardized how archives processed and presented information about the materials they held in their collections. Alf brought this to the Heritage Centre.

While RAD created a new level of access to archival materials, it also created more detailed work in processing, understanding, and describing the materials. Now each box, each file, in some cases each item had to be described within the RAD framework. The work that went into getting a collection ready for permanent storage grew exponentially. But once the descriptions were entered into the computer, it created an equally exponential growth in information available to researchers. A new level of accuracy and accessibility was now achievable.

Computers were at times also a problem. Remember Y2K? Leading up to the year 2000, there was a scare across the wired world about computers crashing because dates were often truncated to the last 2 digits. Computers would interpret 00 (the year 2000) as 1900. Alf was in charge of the databases so that the forecasted doom would not compromise our systems.

Alf frequently worked with data in tables and spreadsheets, sorting and organizing them for ease of use. He would devise ways to manipulate the data and the computer to get the desired result. He moved the production of the *Mennonite Historian* from a literal "cut and paste" system to a digital production format.

While Alf was always ready for the newest and latest version, he also knew a lot about old computers and programs. It was not uncommon for Alf to fire up an old computer with a 5 1/4 inch drive and use D.O.S. (disk operating system) commands which were commonly used prior to the development of Microsoft's Windows operating system.

The work Alf did was all done in order to better collect preserve and give access to God's story within the Mennonite experience. Researchers came to the Heritage Centre from around the world: Brazil, Australia, and Germany, to name a few countries. Each researcher came with questions, sometimes for a court case, a news story, a TV documentary, a family genealogy, a congregational anniversary, or a book project. These people came to the archives and Alf helped them with their quest. Some research resulted in publication and often Alf would get acknowledged for his assistance.

"Alf of the Mennonite Heritage Centre drew my attention to the existing genealogy of the ... Fehr family.... [His] interest and support during the entire research project was exceptional. Via [his] contacts I always received an answer to a question or a solution to a problem" (Arlette Kouwenhoven in *The Fehrs: Four centuries of Mennonite migration*).

"Alf of the MHC did much more than open the files to us. At numerous points in our attempt to put together a coherent story, he helped us in finding other files and provided leads to additional materials" (Adolf Enns and Henry Unger in *Peter A. Elias: Voice in the Wilderness*).

A conservative estimate is that 5 books were published each year acknowledging Alf's contributions. Over 19 years, that amounts to 95 books!

Alf was able to provide such excellent service to the patrons of the Heritage Centre because he enjoyed working with the archival records. He loved to take a chaotic box of materials and create order. The materials he worked with during processing provided the backbone of his ability to help researchers.

Alf, your influence over these years has been immense. Your dedicated service has touched many. Your contribution, especially at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, has put it on track to carry on serving the Mennonite constituency in a strong way. Thank you.

Book Reviews

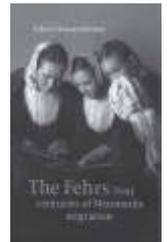
Arlette Kouwenhoven, *The Fehrs: four centuries of Mennonite migration* (Winco Publishing, Leiden, 2013), 264pp.

by Glen R. Klassen

What happened to the Mennonites of the North after the Reformation? Their story has been told in a great mass of academic and not so academic writings, but never in so connected and personal a way as in this narrative. The focus is on migrations, as the *Gemeinde* fractures again and again with whole continents and oceans separating those who leave, usually the more conservative, from those who remain, usually the more assimilatable, compromising ones. So it is that the affluent, urban world of the Amsterdam Mennonites after the *Alteratie* (1574) is transformed. Some fourteen generations later, they find themselves in the parched world of Sabinal, Northern Mexico, hostile to formal education, poor and rural, contemplating yet another isolating migration.

But the faces remain the same. The wonderful cover photograph of school children in Sabinal could have been painted by Vermeer. Are they the vanguard of the Anabaptist ideal or the dead-end of a never-satisfied religious perfectionism? Kouwenhoven doesn't tell us, but her affection and respect for the Fehrs of Sabinal suffuses the whole book.

Much work has been done on the genealogy of the descendants of Gijsbert Jansz de Veer (1556–1615), most notably by M.R.H. Calmeijer, James Jacob Fehr, J.H. de Veer, and Henry Shapansky. Most



of this is inaccessible to all but the determined scholar, so Kouwenhoven has done a great service, especially to the vast Fehr family, in tying this up rather neatly in a chart to which the reader will refer countless times. The chart traces the ancestry of the newly born Jacob Fehr, Sabinal, back to Gijsbert I, of Amsterdam and Danzig (Gdańsk).

Each of the fourteen generations warrants at least one historical anecdote, if not one involving a member of the direct lineage of young Jacob Fehr, then one about a Fehr contemporary or some other interesting character such as Johann Cornies, the great Molotchna administrator and innovator, Jacob Epp, the Judenplan minister and diarist, Heinrich Balzer, the intellectual Kleine Gemeinde convert, or Jacobo Fehr, the alleged drug runner. It is a fair and succinct retelling of what happened in a succession of places: Amsterdam, Danzig, the Werder, Chortitza, Molotschna, Judenplan, Soviet Union, Manitoba (East Reserve and West Reserve), Saskatchewan (Swift Current & Hague-Osler), and finally, Northern Mexico. The story of the Northern Mennonites extends farther into South America, of course, but Kouwenhoven's scheme is very satisfying as it ends.

A welcome inclusion is the story of the DeFehrs who stayed in the Soviet Union after the departure of Mennonites in the 1920s. It is one of courage, compromise, suffering, and faithfulness. Here the DeFehrs (A.A. & C.A.) came face to face with the demons of the 20th century and mostly lived to tell the story. Until now, this moving narrative has not been well known outside the DeFehr family and certainly adds a very instructive element to the Mennonite experience.

The Manitoba reader will be most familiar with what happened in America and in Russia, but less so about what happened in Amsterdam and Danzig. Kouwenhoven's account of the merchant class of Mennonites in the early days is fascinating and fresh. Who knew that brandy distilling was so crucially important to them and how deeply they were involved with the production of luxury goods? It is not until the fifth generation of Fehrs that they are driven to farming after the collapse of the Danzig economy due to epidemics and war. Not until the Golden Age in Russia did the entrepreneurial bent of the Mennonites again find real expression. The fortunes



A small, but enthusiastic, crowd came to the Mennonite Heritage Centre on June 6, 2013, to hear Dutch anthropologist, Arlette Kouwenhoven, launch her book, *The Fehrs: Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration*. Her research at the Mennonite Heritage Centre began in 2007. At the launch, she noted that when she began, headlines about her project read: "Mission Impossible." She was pleased to come back to Winnipeg and now say, "Mission accomplished!" Photo by Conrad Stoesz.

and misfortunes of the DeFehrs in Soviet Russia and in Canada also show us that the Anabaptist vision can be played out in a non-agrarian setting.

But Sabinal is agrarian and rural with a vengeance. Here the whole of existence is subsumed within the faith community. Kouwenhoven struggles with this radical and stark choice and tries to see its validity as one who is outside the Anabaptist stream. We who are within the stream, but whose life choices are very this-worldly and frankly very worldly, are torn between admiration and condescension. This book could help us to see that Anabaptism has been many things, none of them to be despised.

Now the quibbles, which are perhaps appropriate to a journal such as this. First, the maps. We recognize the basic maps, but why are the place names so wildly out of place? (Reinland next to Rosenfeld? Steinbach way north of Blumenhof?) Why aren't the sources given? Were the basic maps used with permission? The same applies to the photographs. It is unusual to refer to Bergthalers as Old Colonists (p.151), although they are closely related. The account of the famous well-rescue event near the immigration sheds on the East Reserve is mistakenly said to have happened at Dufferin. The name change from DeFehr to Fehr is said to have occurred with Jacob Fehr I, but Jacob's

brass plaque in Steinbach says DeFehr, based on village records. The author also gives the impression that Old Colony and Kleine Gemeinde villages existed side by side at the time of the school crisis. All this, except for the maps, is relatively unimportant in a journalistic narrative such as this and should not detract from the joy of a good read. I couldn't put it down.

Maureen S. Klassen, *It Happened in Moscow: A Memoir of Discovery* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2013), 211 pp.

by Peter Letkemann

Maureen Klassen's new book, *It Happened in Moscow*, is a remarkable combination of personal memoir, romance novel, and mystery thriller. Readers will find a



true story filled with strange twists of fate, surprising discoveries, and shocking revelations—proof indeed that truth can be stranger than fiction. The book is significant not only because it is a good story, but because it is told from a woman's perspective. This is something unusual for Mennonite history, which until recently has been written primarily by men—preachers or teachers—and almost always from the male perspective.

The story centres on the lives and fate of three extraordinary women—all of them from non-Mennonite backgrounds, who in one way or another come to participate and play important roles in Russian and Soviet Mennonite history. Their experiences allow us to achieve a new understanding of this troubled history, filled with tragedy and suffering, separation and loss, hope and despair. Maureen writes of "the tapestry of Mennonite life in Russia, green and peaceful, suddenly torn to shreds by the Revolution" (p. 105); "a tapestry of colours, joys and tears" and ultimately a "tapestry of suffering."

Maureen herself became a participant in the story in 1959. Maureen S. Harvey was born in England and raised in an English Methodist community. She first heard of Mennonites while attending the University of London, and first met Mennonite students and leaders at the Mennonite Centre in Highgate, London.

Maureen continued her studies at Goshen College Seminary under the tutelage of Harold S. Bender and John Howard Yoder. She met her future husband Herb Klassen by chance in November 1958, while participating in a weekend work camp in the slums of Chicago. They were married in 1959.

Maureen skillfully interweaves her story with that of the two other central female protagonists, against the epic backdrop of Russian and Soviet history in the 20th century. Subtitled “*a memoir of discovery*,” the journey of discovery begins on an ordinary afternoon in Moscow in April 1993. Maureen and her husband Herbert Klassen (son of the iconic Mennonite leader C.F. Klassen) are living in Moscow, working for MCC and managing the Moscow Mennonite Centre. Out of the blue, they receive a telephone call from a woman identifying herself as Erika Reimer Gurieva, the half-sister of Herb’s brother Harold Klassen!

During the course of the narrative we are gradually introduced to Erika and her life-long quest for information: about her father, whom she lost at age 11, about his first wife, Mary Brieger, whom she knew only from a few old photographs, and about her half-brother, Harold, born in Moscow in 1923.

Born herself in Soviet Central Asia in 1926, where her father was working as an electrical engineer, Erika came to Moscow as a student at Moscow University, worked as a geologist and married a Russian-Jewish rocket scientist. Through family in Tel Aviv, who initiated a series of contacts with the Canadian Embassy, the Manitoba Genealogical Society, the Winnipeg City Clerk’s Department, and the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Erika eventually received contact information for Harold’s brother Herb, working in Moscow. After sharing stories and photographs in several subsequent meetings, it was confirmed that Erika was indeed the daughter of Jakob Jakob Reimer (1891–1937), Harold (Reimer) Klassen’s birthfather.

Jakob Jakob Reimer was born on 10 August 1891 in Karassan, Crimea, to the well-to-do Reimer family. He attended the *Zentralschule* in Karassan and went on to train as an electrical engineer in Ilmenau, Germany. After graduation he found employment in Riga. Jakob’s younger brother Johann (Ivan) also attended the Karassan *Zentralschule*, where he befriended his classmate C.F. Klassen, who had travelled all the way from Neu

Samara to study in Karassan from 1907–1910. Thus, by a strange twist of fate, CF was well-acquainted with Jakob Reimer.

Reimer met Mary Brieger (1891–1976) in Riga in 1914. She was the daughter of a well-to-do, Lutheran, Baltic-German family, highly intelligent, well educated, and fluent in German, Russian, English, and French. Maureen characterizes her as a stylish and inspiring woman, full of vitality, wit, faith, and courage—outspoken, frank, direct, and assertive, with the capacity to take charge.

Jakob and Mary were engaged on 24 December 1914 and married on 22 May 1915. The marriage survived 10 of the most turbulent years in Russia’s history, with long periods of separation, especially while Jakob served as a *Sanitäter* (medic) in Red Cross units from 1915–1917.

During these years, Mary put her language and administrative skills to good use, while working as secretary for an English trading company, first in Riga and later in Petrograd and beginning in 1920 in Moscow. Here in Moscow, Jakob renewed his acquaintance with C.F. Klassen and with a group of fellow Mennonites, including Peter F. Froese, working for Mennonite economic renewal in Russia through the AMLV [see Peter Letkemann, “The Files of the *Allrussischer Mennonitischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein* (AMLV),” *Mennonite Historian*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (September 2006), 4–5].

When Alvin Miller arrived in Moscow in 1921 as representative of the American Mennonite Relief (AMR) organization to direct famine relief efforts in the Mennonite villages, Mary soon became his secretary. Given her language skills and years of shipping-business experience, she probably functioned not only as a secretary but also as an administrative assistant, and was quickly caught up in the largest Mennonite relief effort ever undertaken to that time. Jakob also worked with the AMLV and the AMR, when not working as an electrical engineer.

Son Harold was born in Moscow in October 1923. But less than one year later, Jakob accepted a posting from the Soviet government to work on hydro-electric projects in the Tashkent region. Mary was still involved with AMR and AMLV relief efforts and because of this (or for some other reason?) she and Harold remained behind in Moscow.

In Tashkent, Jakob met Vera Protopova, a singer and dancer, daughter of a Russian priest and a Gypsy mother. Soon after,

Jakob filed for divorce in 1925, married Vera, and Erika was born in 1926.

In the C.F. Klassen biography, *Ambassador to His People* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1990), Jakob was portrayed as a weak and instable man, an unreliable provider and an unfaithful husband (p.74). Now, based on new evidence provided by Erika and other sources, Jakob is characterized as a good man, very orderly and honest, highly educated, musically gifted, and a skilled craftsman. But the unexplained and unresolved mystery remains: why did he divorce Mary in 1925, and did C.F. Klassen play some kind of a role in this break-up? While Maureen attempts an explanation, questions still remain.

After months of agonizing struggle—after all, it was unheard of that a prominent Mennonite Brethren leader would marry a divorcee—Mary finally married CF in September 1926. Since such a step would have led to his excommunication, CF relinquished his membership in the MB Church in Neu Samara before the wedding, and did not renew his church membership until later in Winnipeg.

Arriving in Canada in December 1928, Mary came to know the consequences of this step herself in Winnipeg’s North End MB Church, where she suffered from the bigotry and discrimination of some members, due to her being a divorced woman and a “Kolonist.” The well-known conductor of the North End MB choir, Ben Horch, also experienced such discrimination because of his Lutheran “Kolonist” background. And thus, it was natural that he and his wife Esther became close and sympathetic friends with Mary and the Klassen family. The children attended Esther’s Kindergarten and later played in Ben’s church orchestra.

Mary did eventually join the North End MB Church and was baptized by Esther’s father, Rev. C.N. Hiebert in 1935. Yet even though she tried to fit in and was known in Mennonite circles as the woman who stood “beside” and “behind” C.F. Klassen, I wonder whether it was her initial negative experiences in the congregation that led to the eventual decision to move to Abbotsford in 1948.

In addition to Mary, Erika, Jakob, CF, Harold and Herb, Maureen’s story has a rich cast of sub-characters, including Jakob’s highly educated sisters Sonja and Katja Reimer, the icon painter Natasha Rempel (daughter of Pastor Peter P. Rempel), Viktor and Lydia Fast from

Karaganda, distant relatives Garri and Lilya Klassen in Crimea, the Russian Orthodox priest and martyr Alexander Men, and many more who had “remained behind” in the Soviet Union, while others were fortunate to leave for Europe, or North and South America in the 1920s, 30s and 40s.

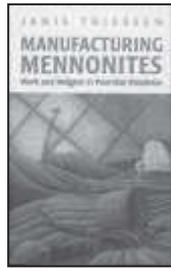
Maureen and Herb are to be highly commended for their many years of service to “our” people in Russia and Ukraine; and for bringing us this moving and inspiring story, that has taken us “to the depths.” I hope that it might inspire a new generation of scholars to examine more closely the role of women like Mary Brieger and others in the Mennonite relief and rebuilding efforts of the 1920s, and also to look at the rich but difficult lives of countless other Russian Mennonite women who “remained behind” and endured the hardships of life under communist rule in Soviet Russia.

Book Notes

by Jon Isaak

Nicholas J. Fehderau, *A Mennonite Estate Family in Southern Ukraine 1904–1924* (Pandora, 2013), 340 pp. Nicholas (1904–1989), the youngest son in the Fehderau family, describes the daily life of his family on the large Fehderau agricultural estate near Melitopol, Ukraine. The narrative traverses the twenty-year period from his birth in Tsarist Russia to the Bolshevik Revolution and the events that “turned estate landlords into beggars.” Anne Konrad condensed and edited Fehderau’s journals into this book form. According to John B. Toews, in the Foreword, the book “greatly contributes to our knowledge of estate life.” In candid form, it portrays “prejudices, family interactions, the prevailing piety, the complications of agricultural business, and the impact of war, revolution, and anarchy.”

Janis Thiessen, *Manufacturing Mennonites: Work and Religion in Post-War*

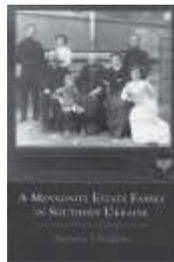


Manitoba (University of Toronto, 2013), 249 pp. In this publication of her University of New Brunswick (Fredericton) doctoral dissertation, Thiessen examines three Manitoba Mennonite manufacturing businesses (Friesen printers, Loewen windows, and Palliser furniture). Using extensive interviews, she observes both how Mennonite business owners try to redefine Mennonite identity in response to changing social and economic conditions, and how their Mennonite workers respond to such redefinitions. Thiessen concludes that “the religious values and competing identity claims of Mennonites complicated their relationship to each other—and to capitalism—in ways that many non-Mennonites did not experience. Their examination of how to be a Mennonite and a participant in economic life . . . was transformed, but not resolved. . . . as revealed in the limited responses of Manitoba Mennonites to the labour militancy of the 1970s” (161). Thiessen shows how religion can affect business history and how class relations influence religious history.

Life Memories: the Autobiography of Jacob and Helene Janzen, translated by John and Lois Janzen (2012), 266 pp. This is the life story of Jacob and Helene (Niessen) Janzen, first written in German and published in 1990 on the occasion of their 50th wedding anniversary. Both Jacob (1916–1998) and Helene (1913–2003) tell of their childhood in the Mennonite villages in Ukraine at the end of the Tsarist period, through the Bolshevik Revolution, and on to Collectivization. Attempts to join relatives, who had already immigrated to Canada, were thwarted in 1929, due to the contagious eye disease, trachoma. Compelled to relinquish their holdings, the remaining Mennonite families were forced to join the collective farms. In

1940, the couple marries just as the fighting of WWII reaches Russia. Near the end of the war, Jacob and Helena join the German troops retreating into Poland. Conscripted by the German army, Jacob serves a short time before being captured and detained for three and a half years as a prisoner of war. Reunited after the war, Jacob and Helene with their children finally manage to immigrate to Canada in 1952 with the help of MCC. Complete with extensive photographs of passports, certificates, letters, and travel documents, Jacob and Helene’s story speaks of great suffering and yet, a deep trust in God.

Wilhelm Mannhardt, *The Military Service Exemption of Mennonites of Provincial Prussia*, trans. Anthony Epp (Bethel College, 2013), 394 pp. In 1862, a group of Prussian Mennonite leaders hired Wilhelm Mannhardt to research, write, and publish a book detailing the origin and extent of the Mennonite resistance to military service. The book was addressed to Prussian government officials, who were at the time questioning the democratic validity of military exemption enjoyed by Mennonites since 1772. Mark Jantzen, in the Introduction, writes that Mannhardt, after extensive research, concluded that “the Mennonite principle of not serving in the military was based on religious conviction, not political or material expediency as some of their neighbors and rulers suspected, was of ancient standing, and was based on formal and legal privilege.” Interestingly, Mannhardt argued in later essays, also included in this book, that the Mennonite exemption from military service, despite its authentic place in the Mennonite past, was no longer relevant and that Mennonites should accept some form of patriotic service. Editors Mark Jantzen and John D. Thiessen draw out similarities to contemporary social discourse over the tension between religious freedom and equal treatment under the rule of law.



The Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC) will be holding a **fund raising evening on Friday, November 22, 2013**, at the MHC Gallery on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University, in Winnipeg. One, possibly two of the *Mennonite Girls Can Cook* authors will speak, and food made with recipes from their two cookbooks will be served. The cookbooks will also be available for purchase. If you would like an invitation, **please contact Connie Wiebe** at cwiebe@mennonitechurch.ca or by telephone at 204.888.6781 ext. 194.