

# Mennonite Historian

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



Mennonite refugee camp in Gronau, West Germany, established in March 1947. The banquet hall of the nearby *Klubhaus* on Alstätterstrasse was turned into a dormitory for families, mostly women with young children (women outnumbered men 2:1). Attached to the *Klubhaus* was a large kitchen facility for feeding anywhere from 500 to 1,000 persons a day. Groups of refugee women were put to work peeling potatoes or cutting vegetables (photo 4); others were appointed as cooks and stirred large 50-gallon pots of borscht, chicken soup, or stew. See story of the Gronau camp, beginning on page 2. Photo credit: Siegfried Janzen slides, Mennonite Archival Image Database (MAID) CA MHC 658-18.0.

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## Mennonite Refugee Camps in Germany, 1921–1951: Part III – Lager Gronau

by Peter Letkemann, Winnipeg

Eds. For the first two parts in this three-part series on Mennonite refugee camps, see the September 2012 issue of *Mennonite Historian* describing the Lechfeld camp and the December 2012 issue describing the Mölln camp.

When the Second World War ended on May 8, 1945, Europe lay in ruins—not only its buildings and bridges, roads and railways, but its people as well. More than 20 million people had been displaced from their homes and villages through political, economic, or military violence; they were now scattered over all parts of Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Among the displaced people were an estimated 35,000 Soviet-Mennonites from southern Ukraine who had evacuated their homes and villages in September–October 1943 and moved westward in the “Great Trek” with the retreating German army. Most were women with children, but there were a few elderly men and young boys; most ended up in German occupied territory in what is now Poland—an area stretching from Danzig and West Prussia in the north to Silesia and Galicia or

Volhynia in the south. Some were resettled on Polish farms, whose owners had been forcibly transported eastward by German forces. Others worked in factories or other industries; some, like my own relatives, lived in large refugee camps.<sup>2</sup>

In January 1945, those who were able gathered what few belongings they could carry and fled westward again, away from the advancing Red Army. They were joined by millions of other Germans (including several thousand Mennonites from Danzig and West Prussia), Ukrainians, and Poles, all afraid of falling into the hands of the Red Army.

About two-thirds of the Soviet-Mennonites (23,000 persons) ended up in German territory occupied by the Red Army. All of these unfortunate families and individuals were “repatriated” to the Soviet Union, beginning in summer 1945. The remaining 12,000 Soviet-Mennonites were scattered throughout the British and American sectors of West Germany in towns, villages, and farmsteads. Some 1,000 ended up in Berlin, while another 1,000 ended up in the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) camp in Munich. Almost 400 were able to cross the border into the Netherlands under an arrangement negotiated by Peter J. Dyck, claiming that they were not Germans but Mennonites of “Dutch” descent.<sup>3</sup>

In August 1945, C.F. Klassen was commissioned by MCC to travel to Europe and collect the names and locations of as many displaced Mennonites as possible. By the time he returned home to Winnipeg on December 23, 1945, Klassen had identified over 3,000 such persons. On subsequent trips, he located thousands more with the aid of Benjamin H. Unruh and the German Mennonite leaders of the *Hilfswerk der Vereinigung Deutscher Mennoniten* (HVDM).<sup>4</sup>

During the winter of 1946–1947, C.F. Klassen, Peter J. Dyck, and other MCC officials were pre-occupied with arrangements for the first refugee transport to Paraguay. A total of 2,303 Mennonites (324 from Holland, 1,070 from Munich, and 828 from Berlin) boarded the *M.S. Volendam* on February 1, 1947, en route to Paraguay.<sup>5</sup>

After the departure of the *Volendam* with MCC leaders Peter and Elfrieda Dyck aboard, C.F. Klassen and Siegfried Janzen (Vineland, Ontario) began to investigate

the possibility of establishing a Mennonite refugee camp in the British Occupation Zone. This British Zone, stretching from Wolfsburg and Hannover in the east to Gronau in the west and Kiel in the north, was where the majority of Mennonite refugees in western Germany ended up.

Earlier, on January 15, 1947, representatives of MCC (including C.F. Klassen, C.J. Dyck, and Peter J. Dyck) and the newly formed HVDM, along with representatives (*Vertrauensleute*) of Soviet and Prussian Mennonite refugees had gathered in Göttingen. Their purpose was to discuss relief and emigration efforts and the establishment of a camp for Mennonite refugees.<sup>6</sup>

The town of Gronau, located on the Dutch border across from Enschede, was chosen as the site for this camp.<sup>7</sup> A year earlier, Mennonite refugees had been able to cross over into Holland here under the arrangement negotiated by Peter J. Dyck. When this arrangement was cancelled, Gronau became a bottleneck for refugees.

Gronau had a large Mennonite congregation, whose membership included the wealthy and influential van Delden family. They were owners of two of the largest textile mills in Germany (*M. van Delden & Co.* and *Gerrit van Delden Spinnerei*) and they provided valuable assistance to MCC officials.<sup>8</sup>

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Photo 1: MCC staff at Gronau outside the camp office (l-r): Lois Yake, Siegfried Janzen, and Margaret Janzen. Photo credit: Siegfried Janzen slides, MAID CA MHC 658-4.0.

(cont'd on p. 4)



# Genealogy and Family History

## A Simple Explanation of Genealogical DNA Results Part 3: mt-DNA and Conclusion

by Glenn H. Penner <gpenner@uoguelph.ca>

Mitochondrial DNA, commonly called mtDNA, is the DNA we all inherit from our mothers, which they, in turn, inherit from their mothers. Anyone can do an mtDNA test. However, this test has limited genealogical use. There are three reasons for this: 1) the surname usually changes with every generation as one goes up one's maternal line, which complicates the situation; 2) many early genealogical records do not provide the surnames of married females, so tracing a female line may be very difficult; and 3) the mutation rate for mtDNA is so slow that if you have a match it could be through a common female ancestor 500 or over 5,000 years back. As a result, many mtDNA matches are not genealogically useful.

If you are going to investigate a maternal line genealogical connection using mtDNA, you must order the Full Sequence to get any useful results. The company FTDNA is the recommended place to do mtDNA testing. Although not as genealogically useful, a few interesting relationships have come out of analyses of mtDNA matches.

To summarize: 1) Autosomal DNA is inherited from both parents, who inherit theirs from their own parents. Anyone can do an autosomal DNA test. It can be used to find relatives who are closer than 3rd cousins. 2) Y-DNA is inherited by men from their fathers. Because of this, it follows traditional surnames and is very genealogically useful. Only men can do a Y-DNA test. 3) mtDNA is inherited from one's mother, which she inherits from her mother, etc. It follows the maternal line but is of limited genealogical use. Anyone can do a mitochondrial DNA test.

Some comments: One should always be aware that DNA testing might yield surprising results. Mismatches in Y-DNA results for men with the same surname may be the result of an illegitimate birth in the past. We now have several cases where this is also well documented in old Prussian

church registers. Autosomal DNA testing could lead to unexpected half-siblings, nephews, nieces or 1st cousins. Although such situations are relatively rare, they do happen.

I should also make it clear that the Mennonite DNA project has nothing to do with inherited medical conditions. Anyone with an interest in this should be talking to their doctor, not doing genealogical DNA testing.

In part 1 of this series, it was mentioned that one should always be a bit skeptical of the "ethnicity" breakdowns of autosomal DNA results provided by the various companies. A recent look at how the DNA derived ethnicity of one set of twins compares, shows that these companies still have a long way to go in terms of classifying autosomal DNA results according to ethnic or regional origin.<sup>1</sup> This situation is also true with respect to the matching of DNA results with relatives beyond 2nd cousins. Unless one has some sort of independent corroborating information, these more distant matches should not be taken seriously. As more people are tested and the computer software developed by the DNA companies improves, these relationships will become more clearly defined.

The situation with respect to Jewish ancestry of Mennonites has not changed since part 1 of this series. Only descendants of Joseph Nowitsky are showing any reliably determined Jewish ancestry. No meaningful (greater than 1%) Gypsy, Nogai, Tartar, or other exotic ancestry has been detected in anyone of 100% Mennonite background. Anyone who has found such ancestry in their DNA reports are encouraged to contact me.

DNA testing has now become a standard part of doing genealogical research. Entire conferences and conventions, attended by thousands, are now dedicated to "genetic genealogy." DNA testing companies now sell millions of test kits every year. It is now also possible to transfer one's test results between some companies, thus increasing the number of people with whom a person might find a DNA match.

DNA testing will not tell you your ancestor's name, nor will it tell you where your ancestor lived. However, we now have numerous examples where DNA

testing has provided critically important information and pointed people in the right direction with respect to who their ancestors were (or were not!). DNA testing can provide answers to questions we never dreamt of answering 10 or 20 years ago—questions that will never be answered by any documentation because that documentation has either been destroyed or never existed.

The success of the Mennonite DNA Project depends on participation. From a genealogical point of view, a person's DNA results are totally useless unless they can be compared with those of others. In order for the project to achieve its goals, many thousands of people with Low-German Mennonite ancestry will need to do DNA testing. The results for these people are, of course, useless in themselves, unless these people also join the Mennonite DNA Project and provide their results together with reliable genealogical information. This allows the administrators of the project to compare the DNA and genealogical data of the participants. If you have done a DNA test and are not part of the Mennonite DNA Project but would like to join, please contact me.

One interesting aspect of genetic genealogy is the possibility of making connections between surnames that are considered traditional Low-German and the same surname found among people who are of known Dutch, German, or other descent. These relationships cannot be determined through autosomal DNA testing with companies such as 23andMe, Ancestry, or the FTDNA Family Finder test, despite unrealistic claims I have heard from several people. Such connections can only be substantiated through careful Y-DNA testing of men with the same (or very similar) surname. For example, Y-DNA testing shows that the "Mennonite" Fehrs are the same family as the Dutch De Veers. The case of the Koops and the English Kobbs has been mentioned in part 2. These are tangible examples, unlike the entirely speculative claims that one frequently hears at Mennonite genealogy events.

For parts 1 and 2 of this 3-part series, see the *Mennonite Historian* vol. 44 (2018) numbers 3 and 4.

### Endnote

1. [https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/dna-ancestry-kits-twins-marketplace-1.4980976?fbclid=IwAR0\\_gmNy4N274-1Dco4pM1MZocj0-KXFQ6c0sDKaFHPJY5-YhSkNq0aLes](https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/dna-ancestry-kits-twins-marketplace-1.4980976?fbclid=IwAR0_gmNy4N274-1Dco4pM1MZocj0-KXFQ6c0sDKaFHPJY5-YhSkNq0aLes)

## Lager Gronau

(cont'd from p. 2)

The Mennonite refugee camp in Gronau, West Germany, was officially established in March 1947 and the young Siegfried Janzen was appointed as director. With the help of the British Occupation Forces, the first three buildings were requisitioned on March 25, 1947, including the Stroink family villa at 24 Enschederstrasse [photo 1]. The villa became the administrative centre and residence for MCC staff, who ate their meals here separately from the refugees. My mother and several other women served as cooks in the staff kitchen.<sup>9</sup>

The banquet hall of the nearby *Klubhaus* on Alstätterstrasse [photo 2] was turned into a dormitory for families, mostly women with young children (in fact, women outnumbered men 2:1). Ropes were strung and blankets hung, dividing the large room into small cubicles containing one or more bunk beds, a small table or dresser, and one or two chairs. A second large dormitory was set up in similar fashion [photo 3] in the *Schützenhof* on Ochtrupperstrasse.

Attached to the *Klubhaus* was a large kitchen facility for feeding anywhere from 500 to 1,000 persons a day. Groups of refugee women were put to work peeling potatoes or cutting vegetables [photo 4 on cover]; others were appointed as cooks and stirred large 50-gallon pots of borscht, chicken soup, or stew. For lunch, some of these large pots were loaded onto wagons or trucks for transport to the *Schützenhof*



**Photo 3: A second large dormitory to house refugee families was set up in the requisitioned *Schützenhof* on Ochtrupperstrasse in Gronau.** Photo credit: Siegfried Janzen slides, MAID CA MHC 658-12.0.

and other buildings used by the camp. Other women worked as seamstresses repairing donated clothing or knitting socks and scarves.

Small children were cared for in the Kindergarten, and former teachers, mostly females, organized a school for the older children. Young orphan boys were housed in a separate building and American social worker Irene Bishop looked after them for some time.<sup>10</sup> The men were put to work on maintenance, renovation, and construction projects, repairing the war-damaged buildings requisitioned for the camp or building tables, chairs, and other necessities. Some worked as cobblers, repairing shoes. Others, including my father, got jobs repairing the damaged van Delden textile factory buildings [photo 5].<sup>11</sup> A few men served as drivers. They

took children on outings, transported patients to nearby hospitals, drove refugee applicants to different processing centres in the British Zone, or picked up returning Mennonite POWs from the British military headquarters in nearby Münster.

The camp itself had only limited medical resources initially, including one or two rooms on the main floor of the administrative building, and other restricted areas in the various dormitories. Two local medical professionals, Dr. Waegele and the head nurse Elise Schwarz, volunteered leadership. They were assisted by up to eight refugee women, who served as volunteer nurses aides.<sup>12</sup>

As it turned out, many refugees—especially those hoping to immigrate to Canada—were rejected because of medical conditions like trachoma, tuberculosis, and other communicable diseases. For this reason, Siegfried Janzen approached the British military commander General Fletcher and other officials to requisition the large three-storey former van Delden villa at 23 Enschederstrasse, across the street from MCC Headquarters, to serve exclusively as the camp hospital [photo 6]. Drs. Stallforth and Stallforth, a husband and wife team, succeeded Dr. Waegele in giving medical direction at the hospital. The Stallforths served until they emigrated to Paraguay in October 1948 to undertake supervision of medical treatment there. They were succeeded by Dr. Jürgen Heber, a doctor from the ranks of the Danzig Mennonites. Head nurse Schwarz was replaced by Miss Madeleine Lehman from Switzerland, who was in turn succeeded by Martha Thiessen (Abbotsford) from November 1949 to November 1951. Other



**Photo 2: The banquet hall of a *Klubhaus* on Alstätterstrasse in Gronau was requisitioned and turned into a dormitory for families, with the help of the British Occupation Forces.** Photo credit: Heinrich Dyck family photo collection.



trained nurses included Sijtje de Groot and Ada Noord from the Netherlands. Young Mennonite refugee women, including my Tante Tina, continued to serve as nurses' aides. With the assistance of a local lab technician, Fräulein Spriebille, and the cooperation of British and German medical officials, Siegfried Janzen was able to set up a state-of-the-art medical lab, which soon met every test of Canadian immigration and medical authorities.<sup>13</sup>

Beginning in October 1947, the refugees set up their own *Komitee für kirchliche Angelegenheiten* (Committee for Church Affairs) to organize church services, choir practices, Sunday School classes, and instruction for baptismal candidates. The Committee also began publication of a small four-page newsletter entitled *Unser Blatt* (not to be confused with the journal of the same name published in Ukraine from 1925 to 1928). The newsletter provided spiritual articles, information on families searching for loved ones, and reports on the various immigration activities and transports.

The facilities in Gronau were never intended to serve as a permanent camp but rather as a transit camp, helping the many Soviet-Mennonite refugees living in villages and farms scattered all over the British Zone to leave Germany for destinations in Canada, USA, or South America. Initially, many refugees were processed by representatives of the



**Photo 6: The large three-storey former van Delden villa at 23 Enschederstrasse, across the street from MCC Headquarters, served as the Gronau camp hospital.** Photo credit: Siegfried Janzen, "Das Flüchtlingslager Gronau," *Der Mennonit*, Juli/August 1948, 53.

International Refugee Organization (IRO) at their main camp in Fallingbostal (located half-way between Hannover and Bremen, some 270 km east of Gronau) or in the nearby camps at Buchholz or Diepholz. Once they were cleared by IRO officials, they had to appear before Canadian government officials and doctors.

Thanks to Siegfried Janzen's persistence, these officials were able to set up by 1948 a complete processing and clearing centre in the main administrative building at 24 Enschederstrasse. Here all potential immigrants could be interviewed and rigorously assessed before being

granted entry permits to Canada. The Gronau camp also became a staging centre where entire large emigrant groups gathered before travelling to Bremerhaven or Rotterdam to board transports to the Americas. At such times, the camp population rose from an average of 500–700 to as many as 2,000 persons.

By November 1948, however, only about one-half of some 9,500 Mennonite refugees had been accepted by Canada; the remainder almost all travelled to Paraguay.

After more than three years in MCC service, Siegfried and Margaret Janzen returned in 1950 to Canada. They were replaced as camp administrators by Gustav and Sarah Gaeddert in June 1950. Both the Janzens and the Gaedderts were assisted by a large group of American or Canadian MCC volunteers, including Lois Yake, Virgil and Helen Good Brenneman, Ruth Frey, Elma Esau, Nellie Lehn, Mina Graber, Alvin Voth, and many more. The camp was finally closed in late 1952, after the remaining 55 persons were distributed to seniors' homes and residences in various parts of Germany. The thousands of pages of Gronau camp correspondence and documentation accumulated from 1947 to 1952 were eventually shipped to the MCC archives, first in Goshen, Indiana, and now in Akron, Pennsylvania.<sup>14</sup>

Further details on the Gronau camp and other Mennonite refugee camps in Germany will be available in my forthcoming book, *Mennonite Refugees and Refugee Camps in Germany, 1918–1951*. The projected publication date is 2020.

(cont'd on p. 10)



**Photo 5: Men of the Gronau camp were put to work repairing war-damaged buildings, like the M. van Delden Factory pictured here.** Photo credit: Peter Kroeker photo collection.



# Mennonite Heritage Archives

## MHA Report

by Conrad Stoesz

During the First World War, the Canadian government passed the War Measures Act, giving the government new powers. When the war ended in 1918, the war's negative effects continued. The war escalated existing tensions and created new tensions in Canada about what it meant to be Canadian. Some believed being Canadian meant being patriotic to the flag, supporting military efforts, and doing things the "British way." Minority groups were pressured to assimilate, even though they believed the government had promised to protect their ability to direct their own affairs. Member of Parliament John Wesley Edwards said in the House of Commons, "Whether they be called Mennonites, Hutterites, or any other kind of 'ites,' we do not want them to come to Canada...if they are willing to allow others to do their fighting for them." Edwards continued, "We certainly do not want that kind of cattle in this country."

In response to public pressure, on June 9, 1919, the Canadian government passed an Order in Council that banned Doukhobors, Mennonites, and Hutterites from entering Canada because of their



**MHA summer student Katie Lynch at work in the archives.** Photo credit for both images: MHA.

"particular customs, habits, and modes of living." The Edwards-endorsed law remained in place until 1921, when there was a change in government. Other examples of minority assimilation include the Manitoba and Saskatchewan School Attendance Acts, which forced government education on Mennonite children, and the pressure Mennonite German language newspapers felt to publish in English.

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights, together with the Canadian Museum of History in Ottawa, is preparing a new exhibit that explores the tension between national security and civil liberties. Canada has enacted the War Measures Act three times (WWI, WWII, and the FLQ Crisis). The Act gave the government certain powers over the economy and the power to intern people for the sake of national security—thousands of Ukrainians in the

First World War and Japanese Canadians in the Second World War were interned.

Clint Curle of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights met with a consultation group on April 30, 2019, at the Mennonite Heritage Archives to collect information for the exhibit. Ten people from Manitoba and Saskatchewan gathered to talk about the Mennonite experience of government security measures. John Friesen noted that when there is a perceived threat to national security, questions about national identity also emerge. Ideas or groups outside the Anglo-Canadian norm tend to experience discrimination.

There were two main points of discussion at the consultation. The first revolved around the government's control over education and the subsequent move of 7,000 Mennonites to Mexico and Paraguay. The second focused on the exemption from military service and the alternative service program. The new exhibit is to be ready late 2020 or early 2021.

In other news...

The MHA is pleased to welcome Katie Lynch to the team for the months of May through August, thanks to the Government of Canada's Young Canada Works program. Next semester Katie will be finishing her last year in a BA honors history program at the University of Manitoba. At the MHA, she will be processing records created and compiled by Mennonite women.

The MHA hosted Canadian Mennonite University's John and Margaret Friesen lectures on March 21, 2019. Professor Patricia Harms from Brandon University spoke on the topic, "A Twentieth Century Reformation: Anabaptism in Guatemala." A good crowd filled the gallery space comfortably.



**Some of the participants at the MHA consultation on the Mennonite experience of government security measures (l-r): Selenna Wolfe, Ernie Braun, Clint Curle, Leonard Doell, Conrad Stoesz, and Roy Loewen.**

## CMBS Report

by Jon Isaak

CMBS offers Mennonite research and archival services in two areas: archival resourcing and interpretive resourcing.

Archival resourcing includes preserving, describing, and making accessible church records and resources (photos, meeting minutes, periodicals, congregational records, reports, statistics, study papers, etc.).

Interpretative resourcing includes offering analysis on questions of Mennonite theology and history, as requested by individuals, congregations, and conference ministers.

I've kept busy this year cataloguing new acquisitions, writing file descriptions, presenting lectures, editing manuscripts, publishing, and responding to genealogical and historical queries from patrons.

The following seven items are especially noteworthy and capture well the current profile of CMBS.

**1. Accessions.** The Anna Janzen Neufeld (1868–1945) diary/journal books were donated to CMBS in August 2018. The accompanying 744 pages of transcriptions and English translations done by Peter Neudorf of Vancouver increase the value of the collection. See <http://cmbs.mennonitebrethren.ca/anna-janzen-neufeld-diaries-donated/>

**2. Volunteers.** Retired elementary teachers Kathie Ewert and Clara Toews, pictured below, have been volunteering at CMBS twice a month for 13 years. Much of their time is spent scanning and identifying photos for the Mennonite Archival Image Database (MAID). See <https://mbherald.com/volunteers-a-world-of-good/> for their story. Six others round out the CMBS

volunteer corp. In November, my practice is to treat them to a recognition dinner. It is a small way of saying a big thank you to them.

**3. Image uploads.** Since 2015, CMBS has contributed to the Mennonite Archival Image Database (MAID <http://archives.mhsc.ca>). CMBS has 32,450 image descriptions (metadata) uploaded to the site. Volunteers spent about 30 hours a month scanning and linking the images to the preloaded metadata. On April 26, 2019, there were 8,649 images linked to those 32,450 records; that's more than 1,000 digital links made since last summer.



**4. Publications.** Together with the Mennonite Heritage Archives at CMU, we continue printing/distributing the quarterly publication, *Mennonite Historian*. The collaborative project I share with Conrad Stoesz (MHA) remains a great source of satisfaction for me. See <http://www.mennonitehistorian.ca/>

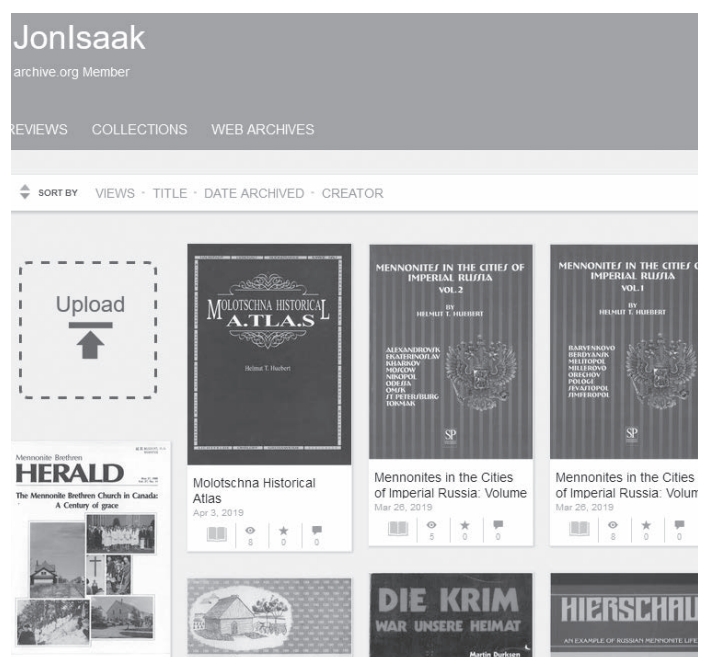
**5. Church Statistics.** In addition to providing consulting services to the National Faith and Life Team (formerly known as the Board of Faith

and Life), I manage the annual church statistical survey of Canadian MB Churches. For seven years, I've produced the annual survey in conjunction with each provincial conference. The survey summary is published in the biennial Gathering Yearbook.

**6. Book uploads.** Since 2014, I've been scanning, describing, and uploading Mennonite Brethren history books.



The collection now totals 80 volumes (see <https://archive.org/details/@jonisaak>). These are books that I've been authorized to move to a Creative Commons open source license, some by permission and others following our "ten-ten" rule: more than ten years old and selling less than ten



copies a year. In return, Internet Archive has made e-books of them. The digital files reside on the servers of the Internet Archive, but links to these pages are on the Historical Commission's website (see <https://mbhistory.org/books/>).

**7. Fundraising.** Twice a year I send an update-and-appeal Mail Chimp email to those whom I have helped by tracking down an article, a reference, a name, etc. Currently there are 400+ individuals on my mailing list. These donations help with the ongoing task of preserving, describing, and making accessible documents of historical/theological interest.

If you have a feedback for me, I can be reached at [jon.isaak@mbchurches.ca](mailto:jon.isaak@mbchurches.ca).

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**Volunteers (l-r) Kathie Ewert and Clara Toews help digitize and upload photos to MAID.** Photo credit: Tony Schellenberg.



## The Thing That Holds

by Kandis Friesen

It is almost a decade since I first visited the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives as an artist; before that, my trips had consisted of accompanying my dad on a quick stop while he dropped something off, wandering its architecture and small museum displays. The Centre's 1970s angles and textures were an inherently Russian Mennonite architecture in my mind. It was a place of mystery and historical care, of uncomfortable carpet and familiar wood paneling.

In 2010, I was visiting family in Winnipeg and stopped by the archives on a whim. I had begun making video art and my work kept gravitating towards historical narratives, experimental images, and a sense of disrupted, non-linear time. I was making videos in the Plaut'dietsch language; I was channelling my grandmother's broken stories; and I had just been to Ukraine for the first time, where I made the strangely surprising realization that Russian Mennonites are, in fact, Eastern European—a name seldom used of those with Russian Mennonite background. So many aspects of Russian Mennonite food, language, mannerisms, accents, visual culture, and ways of being in the world are collaged from the landscapes of the former Russian Empire and Soviet Union, a cultural grafting I recognized right away.

At the same time, I was also looking at videos and films by artists playing with auto-ethnographic forms, challenging static ideas of ethnicity, culture, and nationhood. I had a sudden desire to know how Russian Mennonite communities had been documenting themselves in the medium I was working in—what did Russian Mennonite video look like?

I arrived at the Centre, shook hands with archivist Conrad Stoesz, and asked for all the video tapes in the collection, beginning a day-long derive of fast-forward VHS image and sound. That archival wandering led to a series of works based on a single 26-minute video tape made in 1991 in the southeastern Ukrainian village of Zelene Pole. The video featured one charming and eccentric Viktor Yegorovich Wiebe, giving a Plaut'dietsch-Russian tour of the village he had called home his entire life. Tentatively titled *Tape 158: New Documents from The Archives*, the resulting body of work

unearths layers of a dispersed archive, while it simultaneously makes a new one, a reciprocal gesture that has become an anchor in my research-based art practice.

I begin with this elaborate introduction to offer my approach to the archive as a material in itself: a space of wandering, of following, of listening and looking; a place of speculation, time travel, and uncertainty; a site of interdisciplinary texts and complex legibilities, unexpectedly sutured together on an unstable ground. Within an archive, a sense of montage is all but inevitable, a beautiful and difficult mess we move through to construct a new direction, angle, texture or text. It is a labyrinthine space, a dwelling for documents, a vulnerable and venerable vault; it is a thing that holds.

A plastic bag also holds. It holds images and texts on its surface, food and objects and photographs in its interior. Wet laundry, dried flowers, newly-socked feet when your shoes get soaked. My grandmother faithfully flattened, folded, and stacked her plastic bags in a drawer, ready for any occasion. She respected their previous and potential use, kept them at the ready like any refugee would. An archive of protective plastic, in an array of shapes, sizes, and colours. And such bags circulate, advertising their origin in a corporate logo or an anonymous THANK YOU!, always announcing something on its surface, if only its materiality in and of itself.

In Ukraine, the plastic bag takes on a slightly different role, occupying some kind of hybrid status between my grandmother's thoughtful practicality and a very small-scale luxury item, bought and not given at the public market stall. They come in all

sizes, thicknesses, and designs, sporting knock-off Western corporate logos, traditional regional embroidery patterns, and stylized strawberries, cherries, and apricots so important central to Ukrainian identity.

It is this overlap of cultural symbolism and corporate logos that drew me to the bags I've collected as I've travelled Ukraine over the last ten years. One of the most popular bags is the knock-off BMW bag, with an often-inverted B to perhaps avoid a copyright scandal, as if the German corporation would be worried about an object that the company itself would never even think to produce. As I built this portable index of plastic bags from across the country, I started ruminating on what they hold, and I got fixated on the BMW bag and its resonance in the region.

Responding to the knock-off BMW design I found in Ukrainian markets, I produced a limited edition run of a knock-off of the knock-off; *Daut Dintj Daut Helt* employs Ukrainian folk design and the Plaut'dietsch language to rework the pirated BMW emblem, once again repositioning the national corporate logo onto a hand-held vessel for carrying. It circulates like other plastic bags circulate, distributed through arts-related and other commercial spaces for carrying purchased goods. It is a plastic bag, an artist multiple, a portable sculpture, and a one-line poem, with its lifespan and use decided by the viewer/user.

In my re-design of the knock-off BMW bag, the symbol's imagery is drawn from pysanka designs of stylized oak leaves and the eight-pointed star, pushed into the



Left: A knock-off BMW bag from a Ukrainian public market in Odessa from 2016. Right: My knock-off of the knock-off Ukrainian BMW bag. In the art world, it is customary to state an artwork's materials, dimensions, year of production, and edition number: *Daut Dintj Daut Helt* 2018, limited edition flexographic-printed plastic bags (edition of 5000), each 22" x 14" x 6." Photo credit: Kandis Friesen.



framework of the BMW logo's sphere. These images have ancient roots, with the oak leaves evoking the enduring oak tree and the god of thunder, Perun. The eight-pointed star evokes the sun as an enduring force, and mirrors variations of the geometric form across visual cultures across Indigenous Americas, Europe, and the Middle East. These designs are central to pysanky (also a form of portable art), and date back to pre-Christian cultures in the region, continuing a kind of visual text and history written through stylized symbols and invocations. The bag's text is written in Plaut'dietsch, a portable, diasporic, and non-standardized oral language, that expands and contracts as needed, shifting with its speakers' diasporic movements across continents and contexts. Aural and visual traditions sustain themselves through shifting forms, slipping across materials, surfaces, and alphabets to stay buoyant, circulating, in motion. At a time when both traditional textile arts and regional languages are atrophying amidst the pressures of neo-liberal globalization, the plastic bag is a temporary resting point for both. If there is a place for displacement, it is here: hand-held, protective, and ready for re-use.

The original Ukrainian knock-off plastic bag pirates the logo of the BMW corporation, the German multinational Bavarian Motor Works. The corporation's logo is a knock-off itself, re-working an altered version of the Bavarian coat of arms that was banned from commercial use. The company changed the angles of the original coat of arms design, maintaining its blue and white colours in a different form, shifting it from the textile flag to the metal seal.

This nationalistic emblem has sustained BMW since its founding in 1917, throughout the company's use of prisoner of war and concentration camp labour during its WWII military manufacturing, up to its luxury car production today. The erasure of this history and the embodiment of wealth and mobility held in the logo circulate internationally today, circling back to the prominent BMW-branded plastic bag available for purchase in Ukrainian public markets. This bag is part of a small industry of knock-off designer plastic bags for daily purchases, including the logos of Hugo Boss, PUMA, and Camel cigarettes. The current roster of bags now features prints of traditional embroidery patterns, placing

these corporate logos next to stylized patterns that hold the residue of regional rushnyks, textiles, and texts. Itself a kind of facsimile textile, the plastic bag contains, carries, and protects; it is used, stored, and re-used; it is a replicated text, invocation, and verse: it is the thing that holds.

Language and visual symbols are a kind of archive in themselves, holding specific information, abstracted histories and geographies, and senses of extended and connected time. I consider these plastic bags—both my own and the ones circulating in Ukraine—as mobile texts, performing multiple functions in their materiality, form, and image-as-language. They are a different kind of archive, with a different kind of legibility, continuing a long tradition of textiles-as-text. As researchers, we carry knowledge, ideas, and questions around with us, making new compositions of historical threads; these bags are valuable pieces of our visual and aural culture, connecting the landscapes many of us came from to our current terrains, as we move through the world with so much to carry.

*My limited edition Daut Dintj Daut Helt bags are currently circulating in grocery stores, corner stores, museums, galleries, and art fairs, available free with purchase. If you would like bags to distribute, they are available for the cost of postage. For further information, you can write me at kandisfriesen@gmail.com or visit my website: kandisfriesen.com.*

## **Menno Colony Archives, Paraguay**

*by Uwe S. Friesen, Loma Plata*

**O**n May 24, 1966, the Chortitzer Komitee board of the Menno Colony in the Paraguayan Chaco hired Martin W. Friesen with a mandate “to collect material about and write the history of the Menno Colony.” The board's vision was to conserve the history of the settlement for future generations. For Friesen, his new position was like an open field. There were no existing records management procedures or archival infrastructure, since no one prior to him had been tasked with this role in the Menno Colony. Thus, Friesen became the pioneer in preserving and writing the history of the Menno Colony. His hiring marked the beginning of the Menno Colony Archives in Loma Plata, Paraguay.

The Menno Colony archival collection contains a variety of documents relating to the settlement's history, including some that were produced in Canada before the migration of Mennonites from Manitoba and Saskatchewan to Paraguay in the late 1920s. In 1976, Friesen was commissioned to make a trip to Canada and the U.S. to collect documents pertaining to the history of the Menno Colony in Paraguay. Among the collected documents he was able to secure for the Menno Colony Archives were periodical journals, meeting minutes, handwritten documents, letters, diaries, photos, etc. Ever since the early days of Friesen's work, the archive has continued collecting historically relevant documents.

The documents contained in the Menno Colony Archives function as the primary sources for books published about the history of Menno Colony. The most important to mention of these is the 1987 publication by Martin W. Friesen, *Neue Heimat in der Chacowildnis*.

In the last 15 years, the archive has increased its collection with the addition of numerous books, periodicals, sermons, and donated articles from pioneers—artifacts that were brought to the archives by relatives of those pioneers. Photographs constitute an essential part of the archive. More than 10,000 digitized photographs document different historical events throughout the settlement's history.

The goal of the archive is to document and interpret the history of the Menno Colony. Academics, students, and other people interested in history are welcome to visit and study in the archive. Currently, the board is administered by the local History Committee and financed by the community under the organizational structure of the Asociación Civil Chortitzer Komitee.

For many years, the archive was located in a relatively small room—so small, that Friesen had to keep some of the material temporarily in his own house. However, with the 1994 construction of the administration building for the Menno Colony educational department, a more adequate space for the archives was created. In following months after the building's inauguration, the archival collection was relocated into its new environment.

Heinrich Ratzlaff became the new director of the archives in 1994, a former teacher, principal, and school inspector of the Menno Colony. His biggest achievement was organizing the files into stands and



**Heinz Ratzlaff, director of archives, 1994–2007.** Photo credit for all three images: Patrick Friesen.

creating an index of the thousands of documents, books, meeting minutes, sermons, letters, and periodicals, such as *Die Post*, *Steinbach Post*, *Mennonitische Rundschau*, *Der Bote*, the locally edited *Im Dienste der Gemeinschaft*, *Menno Aktuell*, *Menno Informiert*, and *Mennoblatt*.

An important part of the archives is its collection of books about Mennonite history in Europe, Russia, and North America. However, the collection specializes in all books about the Menno Colony published by authors from the Menno Colony. The archival collection also houses the church files since the 1940s and meeting minutes from the administration of the Menno Colony since its foundation.

In 2007, Uwe Friesen succeeded Heinrich Ratzlaff as archivist and director of the Menno Colony Archives.

In March 2018, the Menno Colony archival collection was moved once again. Its current home is the former Menno Colony high school, built in 1964. The Menno Colony Archives is now located in a room that measures 8 x 7 meters, which is connected to a separate, smaller room, where the most valuable documents and books are stored. Thanks to the new

facilities, the archival collection is more accessible to scholars, students, and other interested people. Part of the archival collection is digitized, a project that is still in the process. Although most of the documents are in German, there are also documents in English and Spanish. The Menno Colony

Archives has an annual budget that projects further expansion in the near future. In 2017 and 2018, the new facilities required about \$50,000 USD in infrastructure modifications. The connections and partnerships with other Mennonite archives strengthen the scope of the archival project, partnerships that consist of sharing and collecting historical documents. Three of these partner archives are the Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein Paraguay, Mennonitische Forschungsstelle Weierhof in Germany, and the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Canada.



**In 2018, the Menno Colony Archives moved to a new location in a refurbished room at the former Menno Colony high school in Loma Plata, Paraguay.**

### Lager Gronau (cont'd from p. 5)

#### Endnotes

1. See Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus* (Altona: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1962), 357–370, for more details of the displacement, a pivotal episode in the life of Mennonites from Ukraine.

2. See Otto Klassen's film, "The Great Trek," for a documentary video describing the migration.

3. Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, *Up from the Rubble* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1991), 104–130.

4. Herbert and Maureen Klassen, *Ambassador to His People* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1990), 119–132.

5. *Ibid.*, 143–154.

6. "Protokoll der Sitzung der Vertreter des MCC," in *Mennonitischer Hilfsausschuss für die Britische Zone*, in the Ernst Crous Nachlass box marked 1945–1950, Mennonitische Forschungsstelle, Weierhof.

7. See Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 383–386.

8. Siegfried Janzen, "Das Flüchtlingslager Gronau," *Der Mennonit*, Juli/August 1948, 52–53; Stefan van Delden, *100 Jahre Mennonitengemeinde zu Gronau* (2004), 29–32.

9. Interview with my mother, Maria (Peters) Letkemann, February 20, 2011.

10. Interview with Martha Thiessen, former head nurse in Gronau, Abbotsford, August 12, 2010.

11. Numerous Interviews, over many years, with my father, Jacob Letkemann, and his former co-workers, including Peter Krahn and Peter Dueck.

12. Elise Schwarz, "MCC-Krankenhaus in Gronau," *Unser Blatt*, 1/5 (December 15, 1947), 4.

13. Interview with Head Nurse Martha Thiessen, Abbotsford, August 12, 2010.

14. I am grateful to Dennis Stoesz and other members of the Mennonite Church Archives team in Goshen, Indiana, and to Frank Peachey and his associates at the MCC Archives in Akron, Pennsylvania, for their assistance over many years with accessing these valuable archival documents.



**Uwe Friesen, director of archives, 2007–**

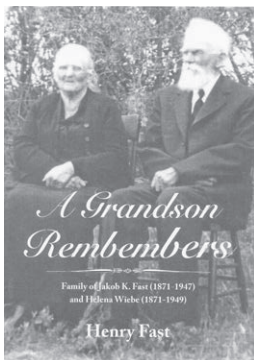


## Book Notes

by Conrad Stoesz and Jon Isaak

Henry Fast, *A Grandson Remembers: Family of Jakob K. Fast (1871–1947) and Helena Wiebe (1871–1949)* (2018), 49 pp.

After a short section on ancestors, the book focuses on the life of the author's grandparents and their children. Jakob was born in Karassan, Crimea, and after his marriage to Helena, the pair moved north east to the Ufa settlement. Jakob and Helena moved to Canada with seven children in 1927 and began life again in Glidden, Saskatchewan.



To help cover debts, the boys were hired out to area farmers and the older girls were sent to the city to work as domestics. The book traces the children and their lives. Contact Henry Fast for copies.

Selma Kornelsen Hooge and Anna Goossen Kornelsen, *Life before Canada* (Abbotsford: Judson Lake House Publishers, 2018), 107 pp.

Anna Goossen was born in Margenau, Molotschna colony. In 1921, she married Kornelius Kornelsen and they had five children that survived into adulthood, including Selma. The book documents



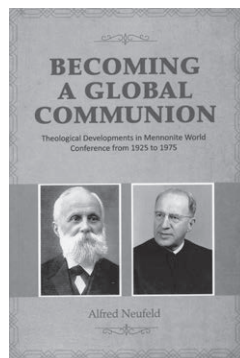
the trials of living in Russia/Soviet Union during the revolution, famine, communism, and trek to Germany and finally to

Canada after the Second World War. Large sections are taken from Anna's diary, including the stories of the children finding dogs, cats, and birds to eat until food from the Mennonite Central Committee arrived. The family made it to Poland and then to Germany where they stayed in refugee housing until they found a new home in Canada.

Alfred Neufeld, *Becoming a Global Communion: Theological Developments*

*in Mennonite World Conference from 1925 to 1975* (Asunción, 2018), 372 pp.

The Paraguayan theologian and Mennonite churchman Alfred Neufeld surveys in this volume the status of the global Mennonite family based on each of the nine Mennonite World Conference assemblies during its first 50 years of existence. For each assembly, he explores four areas: 1) Life in the Mennonite family within the global context; 2) A summary of the assembly program; 3) An analysis of the theology, spirituality, conflicts, and results on display; and 4) Leadership profiles of nine key Mennonite leaders of the era. Alfred invites Mennonite churches to embody the faithfulness needed to advance the legacy entrusted to the Mennonite global communion.



## Book Reviews

Hildegard Margo Martens, *On My Own* (2018), 321 pp. See [www.commonword.ca](http://www.commonword.ca) for copies, \$25.

Reviewed by Maria H. Klassen, *St. Catharines*



In the acknowledgements, on the very first page, the author Hildegard Margo Martens writes that her intention in writing this book was to show “a life portrayed with all its many twists and turns over

seven decades, during which time there were many societal changes” (ix). She certainly did that in this book; she was true to the title, *On My Own*.

She writes in the first person, which makes it truly a reflection of how she feels and of how she perceives her life. Throughout the entire book, I find her sharing very open and honest—she tells her story the way she sees it, naming names and citing incidents with honesty and integrity.

In her “Introduction,” she writes that her life story “has its roots in [her] parents’ traumas and dislocation from a once-secure and -prosperous life in Russia” (4). Many stories have been written about the horrific experiences of revolution, war, and escape during that time. Hildegard, who was born in 1940, says, “But there is more to tell, and those stories need to come from the people in my generation who inherited the aftermath of those traumas and had to come to terms with their adverse effects, and then fashion meaningful lives of their own” (5). She has undertaken a huge task; she has dealt with it in a sensitive manner, opening herself up and making herself vulnerable in the writing of her story.

In her “Background” chapter, she talks about life in Russia after the 1917 revolution and the life of her maternal and paternal families, who came to Canada between 1923 and 1929. The history of this time period is factual and accurate; it moves at a fast pace.

The next section describes Hildegard’s childhood in northern Ontario and rural Manitoba. She was the youngest of five children (which includes her half-brother Henry) born in a Mennonite settlement in Reesor, northern Ontario (24). Leaving Reesor when she was four “represented a loss for all of us” (31). She writes about the following harsh years, living in poverty, and the hardships involved in homesteading on several different farms in southern Manitoba.

She explains the origins of Anabaptism and Mennonites, and tells about the Mennonite Church her family attended, and the tension between the Mennonite Brethren Church and General Conference Church. She makes it clear why she “was a skeptic about the religion [she was] taught” (72).

Hildegard chronicles her school years, the different schools she attends, and the learning she receives, including her Grade

9 year, which she does by correspondence. For the rest of her high schooling, she goes to Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna, where she is a boarding student.

Continuing her life story chronologically, “Early Adulthood” follows where Hildegard writes about her first jobs and going to teachers’ college in Winnipeg. She does not enjoy teaching and goes on to university in Winnipeg, graduating in 1966 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. She moves to Toronto and graduates with a Master of Arts degree in sociology from the University of Toronto in 1970. She becomes the first woman to graduate from Massey College in Toronto with a PhD in 1977.

In “Middle Adulthood” she continues writing about the different jobs she has, landing a permanent job with the Ontario Manpower Commission as a research economist. Although she has several long-term relationships with men, she chooses to become a single mother. “Being a single mother by choice was a novelty in 1983” (227). These years are filled with child rearing and regular long visits from her mother, who stays with her in Toronto after Hildegard’s father dies.

In the section “Mature Years,” her son leaves home for school and she decides to retire. Her mother becomes evermore frail and dies one day before her 107th birthday. In 2002, Hildegard goes on a Mennonite Heritage Cruise and visits the birth places of her parents.

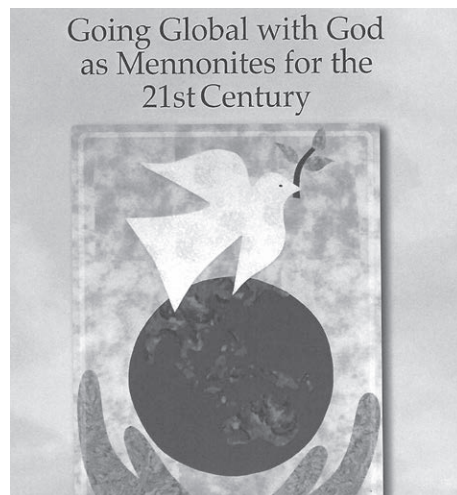
The author does an excellent job of pulling the different threads of her life together in the last section, “Summing It Up.” She starts the book by saying that her life has its roots in her parents’ traumas, and she needs to look at their lives in order to come to terms with hers. “I have also been acutely aware that examining at least part of the lives of my parents was crucial in clarifying mine” (308). She certainly has done this.

She worked hard and was determined to follow her own path. “Because my parents could not provide guidance on what challenges I would face in the wider society when I left home, I was left to make sense of it on my own” (311). So it is that Hildegard’s memoir is called *On My Own*.

Walter Sawatsky, *Going Global with God as Mennonites for the 21st Century* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2017), 110 pp.

Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein

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This volume is listed as no. 19 in the Cornelius H. Wedel Historical Series, edited by Dr. David Hauray and John D. Thiesen. It is based on the Menno Simons lectures that Prof. Walter Sawatsky gave at Bethel College in 2014. Sawatsky is retired professor emeritus of church history and missions at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana.

The book commences with a sermon preached at the Bethel College Mennonite Church on the topic “The Nevertheless of Love” and begins with a question: What does it look like in 2014 to love your neighbour? “Our mission needs critique,” says Sawatsky in this sermon. Such engagement frames the lecture series and aims to probe the direction that Mennonite thinking and living should take after five hundred years of Reformation. It is to seek to glimpse the light and shadow sides of Mennonite history and of Christian history as a whole.

The second chapter is titled “The Pluralities of Mennonite History: Why Russian Mennonites as Paradigm.” Some may harbour a view that this piece might be better suited to conclude the lecture series, rather than launch it. Sawatsky challenges readers to re-examine perceptions on the place of renewal efforts in the past. He looks at two in particular: the early “pure” church (which was not flawless by any means), and the renewal vision of the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century.

The author suggests that the Russian Mennonite experience may have something to teach Mennonites today about engaging in faithful witness within various cultural settings. Initially, it thrived under the Tsars; then it was tested and reshaped under the Soviets; and finally, it has found ways to grow in its contemporary iteration within

the Slavic church world of today. Sawatsky relates a moving story, not well-known in North America or elsewhere, where a series of key elements in the Anabaptist vision have been embodied meaningfully and effectively.

One obvious element in this story is the witness to a costly discipleship, which took so many Russian Christians along the path of almost infinite suffering, almost genocidal persecution, during the Soviet era. Other elements under discussion here are the dynamics of a peace theology, the theme of effectual mission, and the development of a contextually appropriate theology of state, church, and society.

Chapter three is about reconciling free churches to two millennia of global Christianity. The total “Christian” population of the world at time of writing is taken here to be about two billion persons, out of a total world population of seven to eight billion persons. However, within the Christian sector, there are many fragments of the world Christian community that offer little or no attention to Christians in other sectors. The predominant view is that only Christians in one’s own sector are correct or right and worthy of relations. Instead, Sawatsky calls on the fragments of the Christian community to learn to own, call their own, and relate to the entire Christian community of the world.

The fourth and final chapter is about “integrating worship, ethics, nonviolence, and public theology for the 21st century.” These themes will no doubt represent large challenges for readers. There is also much reflection on peacemaking and strong encouragement to become more realistic and honest regarding the reconciling life and work of the church. Almost every paragraph has at least one longer or shorter illustrative quotation reflecting the urgency of our times.

The author concludes with a challenge that if we want to talk about reformation or changing what needs rethinking, restating, and reviewing in our time, we cannot avoid the large tasks that lie ahead. As it is said, reformation needs to be an ongoing process; it’s never done! So, despite failures and dark blemishes, inconsistencies and wrong turns, there is hope in the tangible reality of ongoing reformation both for the Mennonite church in particular and the Christian church in general. For this reviewer, this is something worthy of praise. Thanks be to God!