

Mennonite Historian

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



Memorial to victims of Soviet repression erected and dedicated on Oct. 10, 2009 in the former village of Khortitsa, Ukraine. Photo credit: Alf Redekopp.

Monument Unveiled to 30,000 Mennonite Victims of the Soviet Inferno

by Anne Konrad

Susanna Hildebrand's husband had disappeared in 1929. During the 1933 famine, she picked up a few cobs of corn on the road and was arrested. Sentenced to seven years jail, she died in prison.

Paul, son of Helena Ens of Khortitsa village, was home, recovering from an operation in 1937, when he was arrested at 3:00 o'clock at night. Hustled onto a truck filled with arrested Mennonite men, he was never seen again.

They are two of 30,000 Mennonites who perished in similar ways.

In Zaporizhia, Ukraine, on October 10, 2009 a sunny Saturday afternoon, 300 local Ukrainians and foreign visitors solemnly dedicated a major monument to "Soviet Mennonite Victims of Tribulation, Stalinist Terror and Religious Oppression." The memorial consists of life size silhouettes: a woman, a man and two children. The base quotes the scripture: "Blessed are those who mourn."

Inscriptions are in English, German, Russian and Ukrainian.

The monument, a powerful symbol of the heartache and emptiness of a generation of survivors, is a transformational marker in the worldwide commemoration of the Soviet Mennonite tragedy. It is the first within the former USSR to memorialize all Soviet Mennonites. Many of those who perished were dumped into giant graves that were soon overgrown. Bones turned up when the "field" was ploughed. Others were thrown into rivers, mineshafts or other unknown places. The monument, a place where Mennonites can mourn and contemplate, draws attention to the human costs of a totalitarian system. The monument tells the larger story of tyranny, suffering and oblivion.

After a decade of planning, the monument was erected by the International Mennonite Memorial Committee for the Former Soviet Union

(IMMC-FSU). The city of Zaporizhia was a full partner in the installation. Mayor Evgeny Kartoshev personally and strongly supported the project. Others assisting were the BC Mennonite Historical Society and the Mennonite Heritage Cruise. The memorial was funded by donations from Mennonite conferences, historical programs and societies, private individuals and groups.

The monument was a collaborative project. Designer Paul Epp and project organizers, Harvey Dyck and Walter Friesen, Canada, were helped by engineer Boris Letkeman and interpreter Ludmilla Kariaka of Ukraine. The fabrication of the granite monument was done locally in the former Mennonite Janz quarry.

The site is a public park with a newly built children's playground, tall trees, and paths radiating from the monument site. Symbolically, it is in the heart of the one-time Mennonite village of Khortitsa, the cradle of Mennonite life in Tsarist Russia. In 1789 Mennonites from today's Poland, invited to settle here by Catherine the Great, founded the village.

Now part of the city of Zaporizhia, the Khortitsa park is surrounded by buildings erected by Mennonites and still in use by Ukrainians – former Mennonite Girls' and Boys' Schools, a Teachers' College, a hospital, a one-time Mennonite Church now rebuilt into a cultural centre, the municipal office as well as former Mennonite factory buildings, stores and houses.

For 140 years Mennonites spread into villages, towns and farms across the Russian empire. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Mennonites came under increasingly harsh persecution because of their active religious life, German language, and steadfast resistance to Sovietization and religious atheization.

In the 1920s many immigrated to Canada, but thousands remained to be treated as hostile enemies of the state, religious fanatics, counter revolutionaries and fascists. Preachers and religious leaders were arrested. Families were dispossessed, exiled, forced into collective farms and prison labour camps. Many died of starvation, disease and overwork. Many were executed.

Actively participating in the event were members of Mennonite churches in Zaporizhia and Kutuzovka (Molochna), the Ukrainian Tokmak Rhapsody Chamber Choir, a Mennonite Heritage Cruise choir, local city officials, residents and guests.

(cont'd on p. 2)

Monument Unveiled

(cont'd from p. 1)

"This monument bears enduring witness to the suffering of many thousands who cannot speak for themselves." With these words Peter Klassen, co-chair of the International Mennonite Memorial Committee, Fresno, California, opened the ceremony. Johannes Dyck, Oerlinghausen, Germany, ill, was unable to attend and his speech was read by John Staples, Fredonia, USA. Dyck spoke personally about the empty spaces the monument symbolized, the loss of generations, and the need to fill those spaces.

Valeri Kozyrev, Chair, Zaporizhia Oblast Committee for the Protection of Monuments of History and Culture, said the monument was of great importance to Ukraine both for its extraordinary design and its content. He stated, "Today we open a new page of history, a tragic page. We can openly speak today of those times of religious persecution. Our organization will do everything to build connections between our people and Mennonites. Many more memorials like this should be built in many places." A deputy from the Zaporizhia mayor's office, S. Struk, thanked, among others, the principal of the nearby school (a one time Mennonite Girls' High School), and the children who planted flowers and helped tidy the park.

He said the children would always remember this event.

In a prayer of consecration, Jacob Tiessen, missionary pastor of the Mennonite Kutuzovka church, said, "Let those who see this monument remember the paths of faith and suffering of the Mennonites of the USSR." Prominent Ukrainian historian Fedor Turchenko spoke of a "sacred duty of remembering the past ... ensuring it never happened again." He lauded Mennonite community life as "a model for the civil society that is much discussed these days and is proposed as a solution to many of Ukraine's problems."

Harvey Dyck, co-chair of the IMMC-FSU, Toronto, Canada and main project organizer recalled Anabaptist Thieleman van Braght's admonition that the lives of 4000 martyrs in *The Martyrs Mirror* should always be remembered. Their stories of heroism and sacrifice should not be lost to the community and the world, but be a remembrance and example. Equally, Dyck said, "The story of 30,000 Soviet Mennonites should not be lost. It chronicles a tragic past and opens us more fully to the suffering and heroism of Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, peoples of Siberia and Central Asia and people around the world."

Following the outdoor dedication and unveiling ceremony a further "Remembering" service was held in the nearby Dom Kultury. Later that evening, as part of the program, guests attended a memorial candle service, "A Call to Remembrance," conducted by Paul Toews and Alan Peters, both from Fresno. Paul Toews recalled Mennonite ancestors who came to the Ukrainian steppes full of hope, seeking a refuge. Almost none remain. Visitors lit candles for grandfathers, uncles and relatives killed during the Soviet Inferno. One man at the ceremony told of 14 missing relatives.

Anne Konrad teaches in a Toronto secondary school and writes short stories and historical articles. Her recent work is based on personal interviews and letters from the families of survivors and victims of the Soviet Inferno.

Mennonite writers gather

by Mike Duerksen

Manitoba's vast and expansive prairie landscape may be known as the stomping ground for Mennonite settlers, immigrants and close-knit communities, but the fertile soil also has something else

to offer.

Over the last 60 years, it has proven to foster a rich and vibrant Mennonite writing fraternity that was celebrated during the fifth international Mennonite/s Writing: Manitoba & Beyond conference at the University of Winnipeg (UW). The event, organized through the partnership of UW and Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ont., ran from October 1-4, 2009. It featured the presentation of scholarly papers, readings and panel discussions about the past, present and future of Mennonite literature, and culminated with a scenic bus tour visiting the bucolic landscape and sights that inspired the writings of many famous Mennonite prairie authors.

Award-winning authors like Al Reimer, Rudy Wiebe, Sarah Klassen, Di Brandt and David Bergen interacted with the crowd of about 100 throughout the weekend.

Although Manitoba writing was at the core of the event, the conference had a larger threefold purpose, namely: to keep memories alive among Mennonites, to use the skills of literary interpretation to understand Mennonites better, and to convey their traditions by speaking to the wider world.

Much of the writing discussed came out of past suffering and tension: either Mennonite immigrants meeting Canadian culture and trying to manage it, or people finding themselves on the margins of their church communities.

Rudy Wiebe paved the way for Mennonite writers early on with the 1962 publication of his *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, and Al Reimer soon followed with his historical novel *My Harp is Turned to Mourning*, but it wasn't until the late 1980s and early '90s that other writers came out of the woodwork.

That's when Winnipeg-based Turnstone Press began publishing the works of Reimer, Klassen, Brandt, Armin Wiebe and others—writings that often grappled with larger spiritual questions previously avoided by the church.

Since then, the Mennonite writing fraternity has grown into a veritable force on the Canadian literary landscape. Known for confident and questioning voices, Mennonite authors like Miriam Toews and David Bergen are now considered among Canada's best novelists.

Excerpted from the Canadian Mennonite Volume 13, No. 21 (Nov. 2, 2009).

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Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp

Canadian Citizenship and Naturalization Records

Citizenship and Immigration Canada holds records of naturalization and citizenship from 1854. Records of naturalizations that occurred from 1854 to 1917 contain very basic information. Naturalization records created after 1917 are more detailed, indicating the surname, given name, date and place of birth, entry into Canada, and in some cases, the names of spouses and children. A typical record may consist of an Application for a Decision, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police Report, a Petition for Naturalization, an Affidavit Proving Petition, an Oath of Allegiance, and other documents and correspondence.

It is possible to request copies of the citizenship and naturalization records for genealogical purposes.

The request must be accompanied by a signed consent from the person concerned or proof that he or she has been deceased for more than 20 years (copy of death certificate, newspaper obituary or photograph of the tombstone showing the person's name and date of death.)

There is a \$5.00 fee (payable to the Receiver General of Canada) for the processing of a request made under the Access to Information Act. Each application for copies must be submitted on an "Access to Information Request Form" which can be downloaded from: www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/tbsf-fsct/350-57-eng.pdf.

Requests should include the name, date and place of birth of the subject of the inquiry. When obtainable, also provide the Canadian citizenship or naturalization certificate number that was issued.

All naturalization certificates issued from 1915 to 1932 were published in the Secretary of State annual reports and are available on the web at:

www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/naturalization-1915-1932/001055-140-e.html#a

Submit request to: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Public Rights Administration, 360 Laurier Ave West, 10th Floor, Ottawa, ON K1A 1L1

When I investigated these records for my own family (i.e. material grandparents, Gerhard J. and Katherina Thielmann and their daughter Elly, my mother who was 12 years old when they arrived in Canada in 1924), I discovered that they applied for citizenship at their earliest possible time that they qualified -- five years of residency in Canada and the ability to speak and write English. They landed in Quebec on August 9, 1924, and the application for citizenship was dated August 10, 1929. The actual process was completed on December 18, 1929, and the Certificate of Naturalization sent to my grandfather on December 30, 1929.

What else did I learn? The RCMP investigation reported that my grandfather "is highly respected in Hepburn district, and well spoke of by the few residents of British origin." Also, I learned that his section foreman Mr. Lees, as well as Mr. A.S. Hiebert, the store-keeper, both British subjects, vouched for him. It was also heart-warming to see that throughout the documents, he always "affirmed" his commitment as opposed to "swearing an oath."

Queries

EPP / 1924 Immigration: I would like to hear from descendants (or anyone with information) of the group of 200 immigrants who departed from Suvorovskaja, Caucasus on September 13, 1924 and arrived on the ship Minnedosa in the Port of Quebec on October 10, 1924. My parents, Heinrich and Anna (Enns) Epp were part of this group. Please contact Linda Sawatzky at e-mail: viclin@mts.net or 14 Macalester Bay, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2X5.

Penner: Looking for descendants of Johann Jakob Penner born 25 June 1904 in Alexandertal (Alt-Samara), Samara, Russia and Maria Siemens born 17 February 1906 in Nikolaewka. They immigrated to Canada with the Siemens family in 1924. Their first residence in Canada was in Rosthern. His father was Jakob Johann Penner born 1873, mother, Maria born 1879, siblings: Peter (1908), Wilhelm (1909), Emilia (1912), Nina, and Elisabeth. Contact: Aleksey Shashkin, Russia 443082, Samara, Tukhachevskogo Str, 46-97; Tel: +7(909)32-32-55; E-mail: 2446076@gmail.com

Recent Publications

Helmut T. Huebert, compiler. *The David Hueberts of Margenau* (Winnipeg, MB: Private publications, 2009) 63 pp.

This family history traces the initial descendants of David David Huebert (1850-1917) of Margenau including information about his Martens step-children. Huebert had five surviving children with his first wife Helena Toews (d. ca. 1887), six surviving children with his fourth wife, widow Helena Martens (nee Wolfe) (1863-1913), who brought five children from her first marriage with Kornelius Johann Martens (d. 1887). The age range of the Huebert children from the oldest, David (b. 1872) to the youngest, Bernhard (1909) was 37 years. As a result the younger siblings hardly knew the older siblings. Some descendants immigrated to Canada during the 1920s, some suffered exile and execution in the Soviet Union during the late 1930s, and some immigrated from the Soviet Union to Canada in 1965.

Contact: Helmut T. Huebert, 6 Litz Place, Winnipeg, MB R2G 0V1.

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

4th Niebuhr Reunion

All descendants of Jacob Niebuhr (1766-1835)

are invited to participate on

July 9-11, 2010

at Canadian Mennonite University.

Please contact us ASAP with names, emails and addresses of interested family members:

Nettie (Gordon) Dueck, 17 Vryenhoek Pl., N. Kildonan. W. 204-663-6161; gndueck@mts.net or Maria (Jack) Martens, 244 9th St., Morden, MB R6M 1M2; 204-822-6114; jmmarten@mts.net.



Helena F. Reimer fonds Recently Received

The Helena F. Reimer fonds was recently donated to the Centre by her sister, E. Regina Reimer of Calgary.

Helena Friesen Reimer (1905-1993) was born in Steinbach, Manitoba to Abraham and Margaretha (Friesen) Reimer. After receiving her Manitoba Teacher's Certificate in 1928 Helena taught for several years, before returning to school to study nursing. In 1937 Helena completed training as a Registered Nurse at the Winnipeg General Hospital and served there in several positions, ranging from instructor to supervisor over the next number of years. It was in 1944, during the Second World War that Helena engaged in her first of many overseas assignments with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and later with the World Health Organization (WHO). She spent two years as a nurse in a refugee camp in the Middle East with UNRRA. Then in 1946 Helena was transferred to Formosa, China (Taiwan) where she was stationed until 1948.

Returning home to Winnipeg, Helena took a position at Winnipeg General Hospital as the Assistant Superintendent of Nursing. During this, she also worked to complete her Bachelor of Nursing (B.N.) from McGill University which she received in 1951.

Helena Reimer was a dedicated scholar and educator, and had also become passionate about humanitarianism and so she resumed her work overseas after completing her nursing degree. From 1951-1953, she served as Senior Nurse Educator in Cambodia with the WHO. Her work there as an educator led her to Egypt in 1953, where she helped to found the High Institute of Nursing, University of Alexandria. She served as an instructor and administrator until 1956 when she was more or less forced back to Canada to recuperate after contracting a serious tropical disease. While recovering, Helena took up her studies once more and



Helena F. Reimer (1905-1993)

through the University of Chicago earned her Master of Arts in 1957 in the field of nursing administration.

In 1958 Helena accepted an offer to work in Montreal as the Secretary-Registrar of the Order of Nurses of the Province of Quebec. Helena enjoyed her work in Montreal, the challenge of bilingualism, and cherished the many friendships and acquaintances she made there. For 12 years Montreal was home to Helena, but she returned to Winnipeg upon her retirement in 1970.

Helena Reimer kept busy in her retirement years volunteering with the elderly, teaching English to refugees, and taking courses. She was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Winnipeg in 1974, and given membership in the Order of Canada in Ottawa, for her over 30 years of service and dedication in the field of nursing in Canada and abroad.

Helena F. Reimer passed away in Steinbach, Manitoba on May 16, 1993.

This collection of papers donated by her sister consisted of numerous reports and correspondence from her years of overseas service with the United Nations. There are also some university essays, a small collection of photographs, certificates and other articles.

The documents provide evidence for how Helena served God and others through her work as a nurse, educator and administrator, and was a great promoter and participant of higher learning.

Erika Enns Rodine

Report from the MHC

Staff: The Centre has been blessed with a very stable staff. **Connie Wiebe**, Administrative Assistant, has completed 17 years of service, **Alf Redekopp**, 15 years, **Ray Dirks**, curator of the MHC Gallery, 11 years, and **Conrad Stoesz**, half-time archivist, 9 years. There are also a number of people that have volunteered their services to help the Centre this year – John I. Friesen, Ed & Elizabeth Enns, Jake I. Friesen, Margaret Kroeker, Hanna Rempel, Adolf Ens and Bert Friesen. Thanks to these and others. Since September 2009, CMU Student, **Allysa Lovatt**, has been an archival assistant three hours a week. The Centre has also provided an environment for CMU student, **Erika Enns Rodine**, to fulfill the requirements for a CMU Practicum course credit.



Erika Enns Rodine is receiving an experience-based education at the Centre, as she learns how documents are collected, catalogued, preserved and interpreted.

Projects: Several translation projects were completed – Heinrich P. Klassen (1911-1972) journals and the missionary correspondence of Nikolai N. Thiessen (1874-1949), to name two. The Mennonite Genealogy Inc. genealogical index card scanning project is 80% complete. When finished there will digital images of close to 200,000 index cards with genealogical data.

Together with the Centre for MB Studies we have launched the Text to Terabyte Fundraising Project, which will ensure that the archives will be able to better meet the challenges of managing electronic records. (For more info, go to www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1211.)

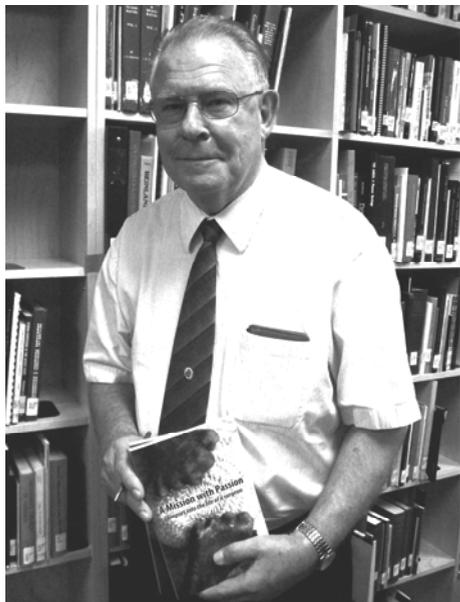
The Centre has entered an agreement with the Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia to digitize the EWZ microfilms (over 2.5 million images are estimated). The Centre has already upgraded its digital storage capacity. Conrad Stoesz has recently done a survey of all the video and film format materials, in order to assess the media at most risk of loss, unless the content is migrated to a digital format soon.

A.R.

Book Launches at the Centre

This fall the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies was pleased to host three book launches, two in partnership with Kindred Productions and the third in partnership with CMU Press for the first time. In all almost 200 people attended these three events.

On September 10, 2009, Dr. Frank Duerksen launched *A Mission with Passion: Glimpses into the Life of a Surgeon* published by Springfield Publishers, in which he shares true stories from his experiences as an orthopedic and plastic surgeon in Ethiopia, Paraguay, and Brazil. At the event Robert, Dr. Duerksen's son, read several vivid and gripping stories, only to leave the ending hanging...with an invitation to read the rest of the story in the book. These inspiring stories are told with compassion for those who have experienced the deforming effects of leprosy as well as a deep appreciation for God's grace and the skills to help others. Anita Durksen, a Winnipeg harpist, provided a fitting accompaniment to the reception.



Frank Duerksen holding *A Mission with Passion*. Photo credit: CMBS.

Dr. Helmut Huebert launched *1937: Stalin's Year of Terror* on September 24, 2009, also published by Springfield Publishers, as a memorial of the suffering experienced by Mennonites during the purges committed by Stalin's regime. Dr. Huebert documents almost 2000 Mennonites who disappeared during this dreadful year and were never seen again,



Helmut Huebert signing a copy of *1937: Stalin's Year of Terror*. Photo credit: CMBS.

including two of his own uncles. A brief history of Stalin's atrocities as well as numerous biographies of individuals who were caught up in the horror adds both a historical context as well as a personal dimension to the book. At the launch, Susanne Thiessen shared her own moving story of how her father was taken suddenly by the authorities never to return, and the impact this experience has had on her life.

A Mission with Passion and *1937: Stalin's Year of Terror* are both available from Kindred Productions, 1310 Taylor Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, R3M 3Z6 or at www.kindredproductions.com.



Ted Regehr responding to questions about *A Generation of Vigilance*. Photo credit: CMBS.



CENTRE FOR

**Mennonite
Brethren
Studies** IN CANADA

1310 Taylor Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 3Z6

CMBS says Thank You

The Centre for MB Studies could not undertake all of its current programs and projects without the generous and cheerful help of the many volunteers. The Centre said thank you to these individuals with a small gift and a dinner catered at the office on November 10, 2009. In total the Centre has eleven regular volunteers who help with mailings, filing, sorting, research, translation, library support, and processing collections.

Our newest volunteer is Meribeth Plenert, who recently was employed with the Centre during the summer of 2008, and is currently preparing to begin a degree in archival studies.

Conrad Stoesz

On October 22, 2009, Dr. Ted Regehr, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Saskatchewan, launched a biography published by CMU Press, *A Generation of Vigilance: The Lives and Work of Johannes and Tina Harder*. Dr. Regehr was commissioned by the Yarrow Research Committee to complete the last of four major history projects about Yarrow, a small Mennonite community located in B.C.'s Fraser Valley. The Harders led the Yarrow Mennonite Brethren church, the largest in Canada at the time, from 1930 until 1949. They are known both for their integrity and sacrificial devotion to the church and their enforcement of cultural separation and promotion of spiritual zeal through an adherence to rigid codes of conduct. At the launch, Dr. Regehr spent considerable time answering questions from the audience regarding the Harders and reflecting about his own engagement with their life story.

A Generation of Vigilance is available from CMU Press, 500 Shaftsbury Road, Winnipeg, MB, R3P 2N2 or at www.cmu.ca/cmupress.html.

Doug Heidebrecht

Book Notes

by Adolf Ens

A collection of academic articles by Russian scholars was recently received. *Questions of German History: Germans of Ukraine and Russia in Conflict and Compromises in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Dnepropetrovsk: Porogy, 2007), 442 pages. The text is entirely in Russian. (Donated by James Urry)

More usable for persons with limited ability in Russian is S.J. Bobyleva, ed. *Live and Remember...History of Mennonite colonies of the Ekaterinoslav Region* (Dnepropetrovsk: Institute of Ukrainian-German Historical Researches of Dnepropetrovsk National University, 2006), 378 pages. The bulk of this volume consists of short accounts of 20 villages, primarily of the Chortitza and Yasykovo settlements. While the text is entirely in Russian, information from data tables, sketches of buildings and floor plans, and lists of names can be gleaned, in some cases by translating a few key words. (Donated by Paul Toews)

Dmytro Myeshkov, *Die Schwarzmeer-deutschen und ihre Welten, 1781–1871* (Düsseldorf: Veröffentlichungen zur Kultur und Geschichte im Östlichen Europa, 2008), 507 pages, covers the Mennonite settlements in the region of the Black Sea as part of a larger body of German colonists. This volume packs a lot of economic, demographic, and social information, much of it in over forty tables. The chapter on the relationship of the colonists to the state discusses, among other things, the Mennonite strife over the organization of the Mennonite Brethren in 1860, and places it into the larger religious context of Russia.

Ernie Harder, *Mostly Mennonite: Stories of Jacob and Mary Harder* (Abbotsford, BC: by the author, 2009), 280 pages, plus cd). The story is familiar: life in Russia (Molotschna and Omsk, Siberia), to Canada in the mid-1920s (the Prairies), then Yarrow, BC; a successful career and a trip back to visit post-Soviet Russia. Details of the plot vary, but what makes one story more interesting than another is sometimes the particular experiences involved, and sometimes the skill of the writer. Harder writes interestingly and appears able to write about and for his family in such a way as to appeal to a much wider readership.

Theses written for academic degree purposes at universities generally are in a style that does not attract a general reader-

ship. Jeremy Wiebe's M.A. Thesis submitted to the University of Manitoba in 2008 may be an exception, at least for readers from southern Manitoba. "A Different Kind of Station: Radio Southern Manitoba and the Reformulation of Mennonite Identity, 1957–1977" is essentially a history (124 pages) of the first twenty years of Radio Southern Manitoba's CFAM station in Altona. How a small community like Altona received a broadcast licence, why Mennonites wanted their "own" station, how the station survived and grew, and what its impact was – these and other questions receive well-researched attention.

Church anniversaries frequently provide the impetus to produce a history book. A 5-member "Anniversary Committee" produced *A People on a Journey: North Kildonan Mennonite Church 75th Anniversary, 1935-2010* (Winnipeg: North Kildonan Mennonite Church, 2009), 198 pages. Since two earlier anniversaries (25th and 50th) had also resulted in publications, this volume is able to limit itself to concise historical overviews and an updating of detail since the last book. Generous use of photos, most of the recent ones in colour, and an attractive layout celebrate an impressive number of members who have served during the years. It also makes this "history" into something that can serve as a coffee-table book at the same time.

Book Reviews

(cont'd from p. 8)

where as "strangers" in the land they were able to not only survive but thrive in the midst of the European turmoil that swirled around them.

Klassen's thesis is that the Poland of the 16th century was a haven of religious toleration that allowed Mennonites fleeing persecution in the Netherlands to find a new home where they could not only survive but flourish. Mennonites lived under the rule of Polish kings for over 200 years, and were able to practice their faith and live in relative prosperity and peace. Throughout the time that Mennonites lived under the rule of Polish kings, the kings repeatedly affirmed traditional religious liberties, in spite of attacks from Catholic or Lutheran clergy, local government officials, or various economic groups, such as the guilds.

The 1573 declaration of religious toleration passed by the Polish parliament (*Sejm*), inserted into a document known as the Confederation of Warsaw, marked a watershed moment in the history of

Poland, and served as a model to other nations for centuries to come, stating in part: "...we who differ with regard to religion will keep the peace with one another, and will not for a different faith or a change of churches shed blood nor punish one another by confiscation of property, infamy, imprisonment, or banishment..." (15). While this might sound perfectly normal to those of us living in the 21st century, this was truly astounding, considering that at the same time religious wars were wreaking havoc and destruction throughout Europe, and nonconformists like the Anabaptists were being burned at the stake and drowned in both Catholic and Protestant countries.

Dutch Mennonites fled to Poland for several reasons. Poland's diverse political, economic, and religious systems allowed it to develop an environment of toleration. Danzig had strong ties to Amsterdam through the Hanseatic League, and trade and commerce flourished between these two regions. As a result, Poland was a natural destination for the Dutch Mennonites. Mennonites were welcomed to the region for their agricultural expertise, along with their ability to drain marshlands and construct and maintain dikes. As a result, land productivity increased, economic activity increased, and landlords and city officials were happy. "Mennonites were supported because they were valued for their positive impact on the economy of a region. Moreover, Mennonites themselves realized that the toleration in Poland was far superior to the treatment accorded their people in many other parts of Europe, including Ducal Prussia." (148).

This is not to say that Mennonites didn't struggle under local political and ecclesiastical leaders from time to time. Mennonites were usually denied citizenship because of their belief in pacifism and resulting unwillingness to bear arms on behalf of the state. Because they were non-citizens, Mennonites were also denied membership in the guilds, and were seen as an economic threat by some. Mennonites also had to pay religious dues to the Catholic and/or Lutheran churches, a long-lasting irritant to the Mennonites. Mennonites sometimes became pawns, caught in the middle as various political forces bargained for each others support, often at the expense of the economic rights of the Mennonites.

However, "Mennonites... learned how to take advantage of divided authority, whether that of the state or of the several

confessions in the region. Mennonites were fortunate in that they regularly found support in at least one of the strongholds of power and were by no means averse to policies that tried to balance one center of decision making against another one. They had learned to live peacefully and successfully in a world where they might not be part of the power structure but knew how to relate to those who were" (67).

Klassen also takes time to focus on the situation in Ducal Prussia (later the Kingdom of Prussia), which was a little different than that of Royal Prussia to the west. The rulers were Lutheran or Reformed, strongly militaristic, and often frustrated with the pacifist stance of the Mennonites, who were not always tolerated as they were in Royal Prussia. Many Mennonite farmers were expelled in 1732, while those conducting trade and manufacturing (cloth making, weaving, and fine-linens) in the city were allowed to stay. However, Mennonites were invited back in 1740, and even permitted to join guilds and become citizens. After the 1793 partition of Poland, Mennonites were accorded full citizenship and full participation in the guilds.

Klassen emphasizes the strong economic and commercial ties between Danzig and the Netherlands, and the strong ties that remained for over two hundred years between Mennonites that had moved from the Netherlands to Danzig and those that remained. Vistula Delta Mennonites were baptized in Amsterdam and married Mennonites in the Netherlands. For two hundred years sermons were preached in Dutch, Dutch hymnals were used, and Dutch catechisms were taught. Klassen also presents a summary of church and worship life, the eventual language transition from Dutch to German, and other aspects of church life. He also describes the relationship between Mennonites and Catholic and Lutheran ecclesiastical authorities.

Mennonites under Prussian rule, beginning in 1772 with the first partition of Poland, began to experience a tightening of the government's demands on them. The right to practice their religion, including pacifism, was reaffirmed, but acquiring land from non-Mennonites was severely restricted, for military taxes were based on land ownership. No new Mennonites were permitted to settle in Prussian territory. Under Prussian rule, new demands were not only made but were also more strictly enforced. Heinrich

Donner is highlighted as one who stood strong in the face of tightening restrictions, not willing to bow to government pressures. However, inevitably, Mennonites were forced to decide to either accommodate the new demands of the increasingly militaristic state or look elsewhere for a homeland. The result was the immigration of many Mennonites to New Russia from Prussia, beginning in the late 1780s.

The last chapter is a sweeping review of the post-1772 Prussian time period with a particular emphasis on dealings with the Prussian and later the German governments regarding compulsory military service. Klassen outlines how the claims of the Prussian state and the dominant culture became stronger and stronger. In a sense the story of the Mennonites in Poland and Prussia takes a negative turn, as the willingness to identify with the surrounding culture and to succumb to the ever-increasing demands of the state wins out over the desire to stay true to traditional Anabaptist beliefs. The chapter closes with H.G. Mannhardt's patriotic speech supporting Germany's war effort on 3 March 1915.

Klassen's book is very much a survey history of the Mennonite experience in Poland, with a primary focus on the 16th to 18th centuries and only one chapter and the epilogue dealing with the Prussian period (post-partition of Poland). Klassen does a fine job of summarizing the establishment of various villages by Mennonites in Poland, but anyone looking for detailed information on the various churches or villages will have to look elsewhere. The book is divided into chapters that deal with the subject topically instead of purely chronologically. As a result, the book is a bit repetitive at times, with similar comments appearing in two different chapters. However, these are minor issues and do not detract from the book in a significant way.

Peter Klassen has made a valuable contribution to Mennonite historiography, and this book should be read by anyone interested in understanding the history of the Mennonites in Poland and Prussia. The issues that Mennonites faced in Poland in terms of being strangers or aliens in a foreign land are issues that Mennonites in North America don't seem to face in the same way, and yet one has to ask if things are or perhaps should be really that different. The demands of the state for allegiance and uniformity are just as strong if not stronger today as they

were in the 18th and 19th centuries, only now they are perhaps a little more subtle. Perhaps the Mennonite experience in Poland can be a case study for how Mennonites today can strike a balance between living in the world but not of the world.

Letter to the Editor

I read with interest the book review of *Fügungen und Führungen: Benjamin Heinrich Unruh 1881-1959* by Waldemar Janzen (Vol. 35 No. 3: Sept. 2009). Janzen mentions Unruh's young wife, Frieda (Hege), a South German Mennonite who returned with him to the Ukraine.

In 1992, when I studied in Germany for a summer, I came across a biographical novel by Charlotte Hofmann-Hege entitled *Alles kann ein Herz ertragen: Die weite Lebensreise der Elisabeth Thiessen*. The author of this book is a niece of Frieda (Hege), B.H. Unruh's wife, and a cousin to Elisabeth Thiessen (the protagonist of the book). The book was first published in 1989 and was in its sixth edition in 1992.

Hofmann-Hege tells the story of 15-year-old Elisabeth, who travels to Ukraine from South Germany in the spring of 1912, together with the Unruh family to help her Aunt Frieda with her four children and large household. The plan is for her to stay for about two years, learn some Russian, and in general expand her horizon. The two years turn into 55! Elisabeth is taken captive by the Russians in 1915 and sent to Siberia.

The rest of the story tells of the immense suffering and loss endured by this innocent victim of war. She marries a Mennonite she meets in Siberia and has several children, but they all die because of the dire circumstances in which they find themselves as prisoners of war. Only Elisabeth survives and in 1966 she is able to return to Germany to once again be with her extended family.

The protagonist of this outstanding story is every bit as heroic as her uncle Benjamin. I was fascinated and thought that the book deserved a wider Mennonite audience, so began translating it into English but have not been able to find anyone willing to publish it. Would *the Historian* readers be interested?

Hofmann-Hege has written a number of books all published by Eugen Salzer-Verlag, Heilbronn (Germany).

Elfrieda Schroeder, Winnipeg.

Correction

In the review of Heinrich B. Unruh, *Fuegungen und Fuehrungen...Mennonite Historian*, (Sept 2009), p.12, col. 2, the first sentence of the last paragraph should read:

"When touring the USA and Canada, the StK quickly realized that these would be the most desirable goals for Mennonite immigrants from Russia, with Canada the somewhat preferred country, but for the time being, immigration policies in both countries closed the doors."

Waldemar Janzen

Book Reviews

Dr. Frank Duerksen. *A Mission with Passion: Glimpses into the life of a surgeon* (Winnipeg, MB: Springfield Publishers, 2009) 267 pp.

Reviewed by Carl H. Epp, retired medical doctor, Winnipeg, Manitoba.



This is a must-read book which cannot be put aside until it is finished! Dr. Frank Duerksen, a medical missionary and an internationally famous leprologist, presents his personal pilgrimage in very readable units. He was born in the Paraguayan Chaco to missionary parents.

The prologue and introduction lead us into the writer's earlier years. As a fifteen year-old lad he prayed fervently for his mother's recovery from a dreaded lymphosarcoma. The son's ardent prayers added to the prayers of others led to the mother's complete healing without the use of chemotherapy. This power of prayer would encourage Frank time and again in his later medical work.

An anecdote from Frank's childhood describes one of the many perils that lurked in the Chaco jungle. The parent's mission station and farm were forty kilometers from Philadelphia, the nearest settlement. One morning several sheep and goats were seen mangled and dead in the corral. Parsley, the native hired hand, told Rev. Duerksen it must be a jaguar's rampage. He promised to find and kill the jaguar. The following night he finally killed the beast but not without severe injuries. Rev. Duerksen sutured Parsley's torn shoulder with his wife's sewing needle and thread. The man recovered well and shared his traumatic experience with whoever would ask for it. For young Frank it was an early lesson in backwoods surgery: saving a life with whatever resources were available.

Dr. Duerksen received his basic medical training at the National University at La Plata, Argentina. Later, post graduate orthopedic surgery was completed at Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg. He married Anni Neufeld, a nurse, and had a happy family of one girl and three boys. Throughout his professional life Frank coped with a bipolar disorder. This frequently interfered with his busy routines. After taking regular medications,

the symptoms were better controlled.

Dr. Duerksen's best mentor and role model was Dr. Paul Brand. He was a British medical missionary who started his career in India. Dr. Brand also had been born to missionary parents on the Indian mission field. During his time in India he became aware of the severe suffering endured by lepers. The main problem was the deformities and spasms of deformed hands and feet. He developed new surgical techniques to help such patients. Later, Dr. Brand worked at the American Leprosy Hospital in Louisiana, U.S.A. from where he contacted Dr. Duerksen. He encouraged Frank to get some practical experience with lepers by spending a year in Ethiopia. Then Frank was to return to South America for full-time leprosy work. He had already been introduced to the plight of such patients during the short terms he had worked at the Mennonite Hospital Km. 81.

Following completion of orthopedic and plastic surgery studies in Winnipeg, Frank was eager to introduce advanced techniques in hand surgery at teaching hospitals in University Medical Centers in Brazil. Much like the ancient physician model of the Greek Hippocrates (circa 350 B.C.), doctors through the ages since have been teaching medical students by example. Teaching turned out to be a major part of Dr. Duerksen's professional work. After training young surgeons at the large Brazilian medical centers, he also helped establish surgical clinics in the smaller leprosy clinics.

Dr. Duerksen's expertise was not limited to reconstructive hand surgery. Throughout his medical career Frank helped out in pediatrics, obstetrics (C-sections) and with other general medical patients, including CPR cases often by giving patients mouth to mouth resuscitation. His Christian mission, his compassion for the needy, and his excellent teaching and surgical skills will always be remembered by patients, students and medical colleagues.

Klassen, Peter J. *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland & Prussia*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. 260 pp.

Reviewed by Richard D. Thiessen, Librarian, Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, BC.

Most people who have an interest in Mennonite history are aware of the Anabaptist/Mennonite experience in the 16th century, filled with persecution and

martyrdom, and the Mennonite sojourn in Russia in the 19th and 20th centuries – the golden years of “the Mennonite Commonwealth” followed by revolution, forced collectivization, and exile. However, few

people can speak of the time period in-between – the roughly 250 years when Mennonites lived in Royal (Polish) Prussia, later known as West Prussia, and Ducal Prussia, later known as East Prussia. For many, especially those who are limited to English language sources, the history of the Mennonites in Poland/Prussia is a dark hole. Many of the significant primary and even secondary sources are in German, although recent translations, such as that of Mannhardt's *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde* into English (*The Danzig Mennonite Church: Its Origin and History from 1569-1918*, published by Pandora Press, 2007) are allowing English-language readers the opportunity to learn more about this significant period of Mennonite history.

Peter Klassen's *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland & Prussia* is a welcome addition to the growing body of English-language works dealing with the history of Mennonites in Poland/Prussia. Klassen was a professor of history at Fresno Pacific and Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in the 1960s before becoming a professor and later administrator at California State University, Fresno. When he published *A Homeland for Strangers: An Introduction to Mennonites in Poland* in 1989, many were introduced to this time period in Mennonite history for the first time. Many hadn't even thought of the fact that their Mennonite ancestors had lived in Poland for at least two and half centuries, and some for up to four centuries, with Mennonites finally leaving the area only in the last days of World War II. To even call the area Poland instead of Prussia was a new concept for many, and yet the Vistula Delta and Valley, until beginning with the first partition of Poland in 1772, were very much under the rule of Poland and the Polish kings. In *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland & Prussia*, Klassen picks up where he left off with his 1989 publication and delves more deeply into the story of the Mennonite experience in their “homeland” in Poland/Prussia,

(cont'd on p.6)

