

# Mennonite Historian

## Gleanings from a Mennonite Newspaper

by Bert Friesen

What was it like to publish a Mennonite newspaper 100 years ago? What dominated communication between Mennonite communities in Europe and North America? What did the different Anabaptist groups hear and know about each other? Indexer Bert Friesen has recently been reading the 1910 issues of the *Mennonitische Rundschau*.

The *Mennonitische Rundschau* was published by the Mennonite Publishing House, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, in 1910. The Mennonite Publishing House was founded in 1908, so this was a relatively new venture. The *Nebraska Ansiedler* had first been published in 1878 and then had become the *Mennonitische Rundschau* in 1880. It was published by the Mennonite Publishing Company in Elkhart, Indiana. These were publishing houses of the American Mennonites who had migrated to America from Europe in the late 17th century and the 18th century. The newspaper was intended as a vehicle of communication for Russian Mennonites, those who had migrated to America in the 1870s and those who had remained in Russia. The Mennonite Publishing House also published the *Gospel Herald* for the American Mennonites. Some content appeared in both publications. For some Swiss Mennonites, even in 1910, German was the language of preference, so there were some Swiss Mennonites as readers, along with Hutterite and other German readers.

In this context it was a challenge for the Mennonite Publishing House to find staff for the *Mennonitische Rundschau*. The main challenge in 1910 was the editor, and secondarily, a typesetter.

Scottsdale was a Swiss Mennonite settlement far away from Russian Mennonites. To this community, the publishing house had to attract a Russian Mennonite to edit the newspaper. This meant that a Russian Mennonite family had to live far away for kin and in a primarily English-language community. The editor had to deal with colleagues who had far less in common with him than he had with his readers.

The editors in 1910 were Martin B. Fast until October and then Claas B. Wiens. Both of these men were educated in Russia with only a village education. Their mother tongue was *Plattdeutsch* (Low German). Thus, to edit a paper in High German was a challenge. Thus, the editing was of an uneven quality.

(cont'd on p. 2)

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



Dr. John J. Friesen speaking to Dr. Otto Klassen, following the premiere showing of *The Burden of the Soviet Star*, on September 30, 2010 in Winnipeg. Photo credit: Alf Redekopp.

## Otto Klassen's *Burden of the Soviet Star* Premiere Showing

by Conrad Stoesz

Film maker Otto Klassen continues to produce documentaries describing the experience of Mennonites from Russia regardless of where they have settled. These motion pictures are available through the Text to Terabyte project. Over 100 people gathered on October 1st at Canadian Mennonite University for the premiere of *The Burden of the Soviet Star*. This work chronicles the heavy burden placed on the entire Russian population during the Soviet period. The event was jointly organized by the Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies.

Between 1917-1959 the population suffered collectivization and induced famine. Many people were exiled or executed on trumped-up charges and forced to work in cruel conditions in the northern regions. Death rates were

between 20-30 percent. From this forced labour the Soviets kept the population on edge, removed the popular leaders, and raked in money off the backs of the exiled people. Over 60 million people died and many more suffered under the Soviet oppression.

This dark era in Soviet history was not the only focus of the Klassen film night. The evening also premiered the English version of Klassen's *Pioneers in the Chaco* and showed a grouping of shorter films grouped together and released on one DVD as *Personal Experiences of Mennonites from Russia*. Previously unavailable, these DVDs by Klassen are now available from the two national Mennonite archival centres. *Pioneers in the Chaco* tells the story of Mennonites moving from Canada to the Paraguayan

(cont'd on p. 6)

## Mennonite Life in 1910

(cont'd from p. 1)

Typesetters for a gothic-script German were also difficult to recruit. If they were found, they too had a difficult time living in a community of non-German speakers. Finally a German Mennonite was recruited. "...our German typesetter has for some time given notice of his termination with us... We now need to train a new typesetter..." wrote editor M.B. Fast on April 20. The living environment and language skills were primary issues to be over come.

There were migrations that received much attention and editorial space in 1910. They were migrations in Russia, from the colonies in Ukraine to Siberia, and migrations in America, particularly to California. The economic hardships in the Russian Terek colony also received much attention.

The expansion of the colony system in Russia was ongoing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The expansion was to the east from Arkadak to the north and Terek to the south and the Siberian colonies further east, including Barnaul and Pavlodar. The content published is usually of economic hardships and pleas for assistance. For example, on April 13 from the Pavlodar Colony, we read:

"...we have been here [Pavlodar Colony] nearly three years since we settled here. We have experienced much. This winter two of our children died. The first winter we lost a horse and two foals and this winter another horse. Our misfortunes have made us so poor that we have need of everything; our clothes are worn, and we have no money. We have only two horses, and one cow. For this spring we need another horse, otherwise we will not be able to seed.

"Please, Mr. Fast, we beseech you most heartily, is there any assistance from you [in America]? God will bless you again."  
[signed] *Peter and Elisabeth Schartner*

Then, On April 27 from the Terek Colony, Abraham Klassen writes:

"The report in the *Rundschau*, that all our debts on the Terek colony have been covered, must be a misunderstanding. If our loving mother colony would do that, we would still not be assisted. We cannot stay here. Dear friends, believe me, our earthly outlook here is miserable, but up above we will be happy. I believe the mother colony is doing too little for us..... The settlement is perishing. One village is totally deserted, another by a third, and in every village some [families] have left. The Terekers would gladly leave because it is going down fast. We do not want to be indebted,

but the leaders of the mother colony need to step up and assist us.....I am Peter Klassen's Abraham.. from Konteniusfeld. I have uncles ... and cousins there... maybe they can report something to us."

Through the *Rundschau*, monies were funneled to colony representatives to be distributed. There were plans for individual families to migrate to the southern states of America. Often the appeals were responded to by relatives in America. Conversely, there was an ongoing request by relatives in America for more news from the internal migrants in Russia.

In America, the movement of people was west. A major effort was to California. Most Mennonites settled in the southern half of the state. Some found the climate attractive; others came for better economic opportunities. Peter Fast writes:

"We have many visitors coming here [California] to visit friends and get to know the region and buy land. Some from Dakota have purchased land in this region, about six miles south of Reedley. It was 3,200 acres for a net sum of \$272,000, which they will divide into nine parcels. Likely many will come and so maybe the land will be further divided... it is good land... It will become a wonderful settlement." (March 2)

For some it did not meet expectations, and they returned from whence they came. Some developers took advantage of the desire to move to California. Heinrich Kohlfeld writes on March 16:

"We were enticed by their persuasive speech. It seemed so easy to have a wonderful life on 15 or 20 acres..... the genuineness of the land deeds and these were backed by the state.... I gave him my deeds for the land estimated in value of \$3,025 and they gave me their deed for 15 acres, with an estimated value of \$2,625... then we found out that [he] only had an option on the land..... he only had promissory notes... so that he still owed for nearly all the land from \$15 to \$75 per acre..... So it is clear that... we do not have any land here, unless we purchase some again."

The Hutterites had migrated to America along with the Mennonites in the 1870s. Some of them managed to establish communal colonies in South Dakota. One Hutterite group, known as the Prarieleut, settled on individual homesteads. It was these people, mainly, who were the contributors to the *Rundschau* in 1910. John Kleinsasser describes a impact of a fatal accident in California:

"The dear mother also was hit on the back of the head; also the chest was compressed

and the left arm fractured. She lived only about ten minutes, without regaining consciousness, just breathing.....

All please pray for me.... I know the Lord means only the best for me and will assist me through this world.... letters of comfort which I received: ...from Br. and Preacher Joseph Glanzer, Bridgewater, S. Dak., my dear sister Kath. Waldner, Tabor, S. Dak., ... Jos. Wipf, Carpenter, S. Dak....." (September 28)

Among the Swiss Mennonites, that is, those Mennonites who migrated to America in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and 18<sup>th</sup> century, not only from Switzerland but also from other Germanic countries in central western Europe, there were still some German speakers/readers in 1910. By 1910 these immigrants had formed various subgroups within the Anabaptist group, such as the Amish and Old Order people. They too had contributors to the *Rundschau* in 1910. E.L. Frey submitted a report of the Western District Conference of the Amish Mennonite Church, held on the 15-16 September 1910 in the Crystal Springs Church, near Crystal, Kansas. (October 19)

In summary, the *Mennonitische Rundschau* starting its 4<sup>th</sup> decade of publication, continued to be an effective vehicle of communication among the various Anabaptist groups in 1910. Challenges were met and dealt with effectively. It was a service that was appreciated by many. We are the beneficiaries of these efforts today.

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# Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp

## Report on Mennonite Heritage Tour to Poland

by Al Hamm of Steinbach, Manitoba

It was a beautiful sunny morning of June 11, 2010 when our plane left Frankfurt and headed for Warsaw. As we were approaching our destination, I saw the landscape of Poland in lush green fields of crops and countryside. I also noticed rivers and streams, and remembered that southern Poland had received a lot of rain about two weeks earlier. In mounting excitement I wondered which of these rivers was the Vistula, and were we flying over the 'Weichsel Niederung' that my grandfather had mentioned in his life story. I had come to Poland (formerly Prussia) to learn more about our Mennonite heritage in this part of Europe, and more specifically to visit the areas that my grandfather wrote about. Our tour had been organized by Alan Peters of the California Mennonite Historical Society, and was to begin the next day.

As arranged, I met some other members of our tour group at the Warsaw airport, and together we took a new modern bus to the Novotel Centrum Hotel. I was immediately impressed with the cleanliness of the streets and the city itself, as well as the friendliness of the people.

Next day, Saturday, our group met in the lobby of the hotel, and we were introduced to each other. Our tour began with a visit to Lasienski Park with its monument to Chopin, the rebuilt historic Old Town (Warsaw was 85% destroyed by the Nazis in 1944) and the 1943 Warsaw Uprising monument. On day 2, we drove through the picturesque countryside along the Vistula River. We had our first view of the large dikes which our Mennonite ancestors built to drain the swampy regions and convert them into lands that were fertile and productive. Enroute we visited villages and cemeteries in the Wymśle region, and arrived late afternoon in Torun (Thorn), birth place of Copernicus, noted astronomer of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. On day 3, we continued to Gdansk, with stops that were of interest; Schoesee (Sosnowka), Schoe-neich (Szynych), Niedergruppe (Dolna

Grupa), Gross Lubin (Wlk. Lubien), Montau (Matawy), Sprind (Zdrojewo), Weide (Pastwiske), and Sandberg (Piaski). Other stops this day included Stuhm (Sztum), Montauweide (Montowo), and the Tragheimerweide cemetery.

On day 4, we toured Danzig (Gdansk) including Danzig Mennonite Church. Like Warsaw, Danzig was 85% destroyed by the Russians in early 1945, but now totally rebuilt to its former self. We took a drive to Elbing (Eblag). Here we met a Mr. Stein, scholar and historian, who is working on restoring a 1902 building for a Mennonite museum and is involved in promoting Mennonite history. In Tiegenhof (Nowy Dwor) a 150-year old Mennonite house has been restored, and nearby a lapidarium has been established which holds numerous Mennonite gravestones salvaged from 11 different cemeteries. All Mennonite cemeteries in former Prussia have long ago been abandoned and neglected. Grave stones have been stolen, stones and markers that remain have been broken and vandalized, some graves have fallen in or collapsed, weeds, tall grass, large brush and huge trees cover the entire cemeteries to the extent that from a distance they look like a forest or uninhabited areas.

On day 5 we visited the Malbork Castle, a great fortress of the Teutonic Knights, and stopped in at various Mennonite villages. The Heuboden (Stogi) cemetery is huge, and is presently being cleaned up by local people and includes grave stones that have on them names like Classen, Harder, Entz, Penner, Neufeld and others. We found the Rosenort (Rozewo) cemetery nestled in the beautiful area of yellow canola fields, along well kept roads lined with big mature trees. Rosenort is significant because the old church records of this congregation were destroyed in a flood 150 years ago. It is also from here that the first wagon train of people left in 1789 for South Russia.

Our tour leader Alan Peters, being a genealogist himself, was very organized and helpful in this heritage tour. Whenever we would enter a village, he would call out the names of people who had ancestors from there, and would provide ongoing commentary about Mennonite history in Prussia.

The last day (day 7) we drove to the Baltic Sea at Stegna, and took in a tour of the Stutthof concentration camp. We were told that of the 16 million people who died in concentration camps during WWII, 66,000 died at Stutthof. We concluded our heritage tour with a farewell dinner Friday night, and had to say our goodbyes to new friends that we had come to know and appreciate.

I arrived home on Monday June 21, 2010, having experienced a trip I had dreamed about for years. I will not easily forget the people I met, the new friends I made, and visiting a part of the world where our Mennonite ancestors left examples of hard work, and a well organized community life.

## Queries

**Sawatzky / Thiessen** - I am hoping to make contact with anyone who knew of Margaretha (Sawatzky) Thiessen born 1894 to Peter and Katharina (Reimer) Sawatzky, married in 1916 to Jacob Thiessen, son of Franz and Eva (Dueck) Thiessen, and who died in 1930 shortly after giving birth to their 8th child (my father). Any information is appreciated such as stories, photos, or an obituary. Contact: Janet Braybrook, 14723 - 115 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T5X 1H7 or e-mail: jaybeex4@hotmail.com

## Recent Publications

Andreas Sawazki, *Stammbuchführung von Dietrich Peters 1776-2008*. 2. Auflage (Germany: Private Publication, 2009) 402 pp.

**D**ietrich Peters (1776-1837) and Margaretha Wiens (1783-1836) lived in Prussia and had six children including a son Bernhard Peters (1816-1912). In 1842 he moved to the Molotschna where, in 1847, he married Agatha Wiens (1824-1912). It is the descendants of this family the book follows most closely. Descendants can now be found in Germany, Canada, Russia, and numerous former Soviet republics. There is very little narrative, but where it does exist it is in both German and English. The book includes many photographs, which are well reproduced in black and white as well as colour. Contact: Centre for MB Studies for further information.

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## MHC Staffing Update



In the September 2010 issue of *Mennonite Historian*, we announced that Connie Wiebe would be leaving the Centre after 18 years of service, to go to another position within Mennonite Church Canada. However, following a period of personal reflection including some on the job experience, Connie decided that her interests and gifts could best be employed by continuing as Administrative Assistant at the Centre. We are pleased to have her continue.

A.R.

## NADP Project Completed

For the past two months Yvonne Snider-Nighswander has been processing the papers of the late Heidi Koop (1939-2002). The work included the appraisal, culling, arranging, describing and the physical processing of photographs, art works and textual records, including the production of a finding aid for research purposes. The final product can be seen on our website at: [www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives/holdings/personalholdings.htm](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives/holdings/personalholdings.htm).

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through Library and Archive Canada, and administered by the Canadian Council of Archives. The National Archival Development Program (NADP) is designed to increase the capacity of archival institutions in Canada to preserve and make accessible archival heritage.

A.R.



**Yvonne Snider-Nighswander.** Photo Credit: Alf Redekopp

## Heidi Koop fonds

The Heidi Koop fonds consists of 264 photographs, 53 works of art, and about 1 metre of textual records. The textual records are organized into seven categories of files: introduction, education, professional life, writings, travel, collected materials and journals.

Adelheid (Heidi) Else Koop was born in Winnipeg on April 27, 1939, to Peter and Mariechen (Dyck) Koop. She graduated from Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute in 1958, and after completing studies at the Manitoba Teachers College, began teaching elementary school in 1959 at Princess Margaret School in North Kildonan. This is where she remained until 1966, when she moved to Lord Kitchener School.

In September 1967, Heidi began studies at the University of Manitoba, graduating with the Bachelor of Home Economics and Bachelor of Education degrees in 1970. She then taught Home Economics at Springfield Collegiate in Oakbank, Manitoba for two years before moving to Mennonite Brethren Communications to be the office manager 1973 to 1975.

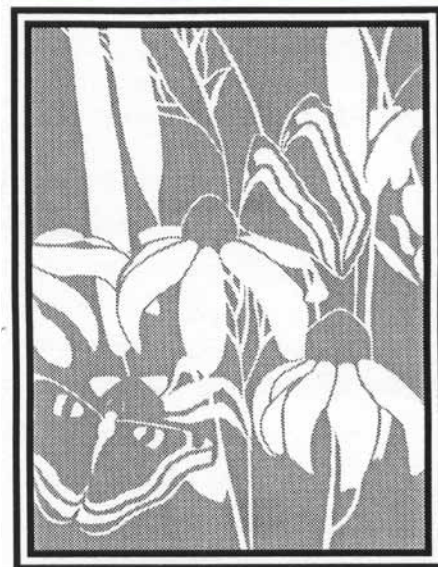
In 1975 Heidi moved to Elkhart, Indiana, U.S.A. to begin her seminary studies at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. This was a rich time for her, both academically and socially; she was challenged theologically and found many kindred spirits. She was able to take recreational painting classes.

Heidi Koop graduated with the Master of Divinity degree in 1978, and returned to Canada to teach Church Ministry at Elim Bible Institute until 1981. It was while she was living in Altona that her older sister, Edith died at age 45. Heidi was Dean of Students when she resigned and returned to Winnipeg, to work at the Bethania Personal Care Home. This was followed by working for the Huntington's Disease Resource Centre.

In 1981 Heidi returned to school for more graduate studies, this time earning a Master of Education from the University of Manitoba in 1983.

Always an active member of River East Mennonite Brethren Church, Heidi was appointed Deaconess, in 1983.

Her professional life concluded at the University of Manitoba as faculty advisor to student teachers and managing coordinator for the Educational Gerontology Internship program. Alongside her studies and work, Heidi regularly had



**Alight Gently, ink on paper, done by Heidi Koop, 1992.** MHC Artworks Coll. 37:21.

articles published and at the time of her death had published four books: *Peter, a man of stamina and courage*, 1979; *The hell of God's call*, 1991; *A healthier you: a layperson's guide to optimum health*, 1995; and *Surviving the medical maze*, 1996, 1997. *The band plays on: Mennonite pioneers of Nord Kildonan reflect*, 1998, remains unpublished.

Another area of artistic expression for Heidi was drawing and painting, which is demonstrated by the substantial body of work she produced. She has one series to illustrate the North Kildonan manuscript. She worked with graphite, coloured pencil, water colour paint, and ground ink.

The last period of Heidi's life was consumed with three significant events: the diagnosis of her cancer in 1986, the final illness and death of her father in 1990, and through-out this entire period, the progression of her mother's Alzheimer's until Mrs. Koop's death in 1998. As the only surviving daughter, Heidi carried the responsibility of making decisions and providing parental care -- a duty which she took seriously, while dealing with her own health crises. Heidi's struggle with cancer was notable for the way in which she resolutely used alternative approaches to combat the cancer. She wrote articles and was invited to speak about her alternative health journey. Heidi died in Winnipeg September 18, 2002.

She had requested that her archival papers be given to the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

*Yvonne Snider-Nighswander*

# So who on earth was Barbara?

The Centre for MB Studies is fortunate to have dedicated and skilled volunteers working at the Centre who do a myriad of tasks. Once a year the Centre hosts an event in their honor. At this year's event Clara Toews shared the following thoughts. Clara is a retired elementary teacher and member at McIvor MB. -- CS



Lists of people... long lists! That's what the archives have lots of. Recently I've been typing one particular set of names into the computer. It's the 1881-1882 record of births of the Reinländer Mennonite Church. Included are the name of the child, the father, mother, midwife, the name of the person who registered the child and the home village. As I type away my mind wanders, I lose my place and keep having to reorient myself. (Progress has been a little slow). Your first thought when I said that my mind wanders was probably, "no wonder, since it's so repetitive". But that's not the whole story. Neither is the fact that I've always been somewhat absentminded. It's funny, but as I've been working at the computer, I've started wondering about some of these people.

Now the records are handwritten in the old Gothic script which I don't actually read. However, because there is a small core of names used over and over again I've been able to decipher them with a little help from some of the people working at the archives who do read it. You know the names: Heinrich, Abram, Isaak, Johann, Cornelius, Jacob and a few others prominent among males, and names like Katarina, Anna, Maria, Anganetha, Margaretha, Sara and Gertrude common among females. Then one day, there it was – the mother's name was Barbara! Who on earth was Barbara, and where did she get her name? Why did she have a name that was different from the others? She would have been born in Russia, or could she have been an emigrant from Prussia to Russia? Maybe, Barbara had not actually been Mennonite but belonged to one of the other German Russian groups and had married into the Mennonite community. Maybe at one

point it was a more common name among Prussian Mennonites and her family had hung on to it. Maybe it doesn't matter, but it's interesting and seems to lead to other questions.

Who actually were the people on these lists? Barbara, Anganetha, Abram, Jacob... what were their lives like? What became of the babies? Their mothers? Well there are some answers to those questions in the books of historical records prepared for the Reinländer, and Sommerfelder groups. Conrad Stoesz showed me that some of these people's fates can be discovered by checking the records. (Many of you probably know this, but it was exciting for me). Not infrequently, babies and/or their mothers didn't survive. Other children survived the birth but died in childhood. For instance, I learned that of the set of triplets born to Dietrich and Anna Peters on June 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> at Neuendorf, two died the day of the birth as did their mother a few days later. More surprisingly, one of the infants actually survived until 1914. I also learned that the father of the triplets married 5 times. When I look at that information, I am struck with the seemingly predictable sadness and suffering in the lives of this group of people. For women the dangers of childbirth, for men the sorrow of burying wife after wife, and the practical crisis this created for the family.

And who were those intrepid midwives? I have visions of them waking to the possibly anticipated knock at the door and heading out on bad roads into the bitterly cold winter night, fighting concerns about the family they had left behind and anxieties about the task ahead. How much confidence did they really have that they could handle the challenges they faced? And they do all appear to have been women except for one Heinrich Bergen who is recorded as having helped little Bernard Wiebe into the world on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February, 1881. How did that happen?

Lots more questions come to mind. How

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did the frequent loss of a young wife influence attitudes to marriage and family? Did they treasure their relationships more deeply than we do, or did their emotions become numb? Were they happy at least sometimes? Did they expect happiness? How did they keep the faith? In what ways did they experience Christian belief and discipleship differently than I do?

With the prejudices and perhaps arrogance of a woman living more than a century later, I look at those lists and wonder about the point of these people's lives. An existence which appears to have offered few choices, so much suffering and such endless, unrelenting drudgery. Did they ask about the purpose of their lives? What did they ask themselves?

While I was mulling over these thoughts, I was reminded of words from an older source. In the deeply personal 139<sup>th</sup> Psalm, the writer speaks of the value of each life and of the mysterious ways of God. These are words for us and for the people on the lists.

"My frame was not hidden from you,  
When I was being made in secret,  
Intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance..."

Each of us and each of the people among whom we live is known intimately by God. Each one of us has a story. It makes getting to know and to understand one another not only interesting, but also important. Each of the people on these lists is known intimately by God. Each Jacob, Cornelius, Anna and Barbara counts in God's eyes. Each person has a story that matters.

I think that's one of the reasons people keep digging around in archives; they believe that people's lives, no matter how seemingly ordinary, have value and interest. Telling their stories is a part of bearing witness to the value of life. Being able to be part of the telling of those stories is a privilege. Clara Toews

140	26 Noebe	Barbara	Wolff	Wolff	Wolff
141	11/18/81	Barbara	Wolff	Wolff	Wolff

1881

140	26 Noebe	Barbara	Wolff	Wolff	Wolff
141	11/18/81	Barbara	Wolff	Wolff	Wolff





Professor Fedor Turchenko (right), formerly Dean of the History Faculty and now Chair in Contemporary Ukrainian History of Zaporizhye State University) congratulates Winnipeg author and architect, Rudy Friesen (left), on the publication of his book, *Building on the Past: Mennonite Architecture, Landscape and Settlements in Russia/Ukraine* in Ukrainian. At a book launch was held on October 11, aboard the *Princess Dnieper* and in the presence of 160 passengers from the Mennonite Heritage Cruise. (A copy has been deposited in the Mennonite Historical Library at Canadian Mennonite University.) Photo credit: David Regehr.

## MMHS 2011 Calendar

On November 8, 2010, the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (MMHS) released a calendar depicting scenes from Mennonite life 1910-1950 in the prairie region. The calendar continues the society's commitment to foster interest in Mennonite heritage and to explore past and present Mennonite experience. The MMHS 2011 Calendar draws out rare images from the collections at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies and the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives. In addition to featured archival images, the wall calendar includes historic "Dates to Remember" as well as details about the MMHS and "Upcoming Events."



The MMHS 2011 Calendar is available for \$7.00 from the Society at 1310 Taylor Avenue, Winnipeg, or the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd.

*Conrad Stoesz, MMHS President*

## Otto Klassen film night

*(cont'd from p. 1)*

Chaco in the 1920s and their success in establishing thriving communities.

*Personal Experiences of Mennonites from Russia* features eye-witness accounts and storytellers such as Gerhard Ens, Peter J. Dyck, Marlene Epp and others.

These three educational DVDs adds to the growing list of titles available through the Text to Terabyte project, a joint venture of the Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Centre for Mennonites Brethren Studies, raising funds for their archival programs. For a minimum donation of \$30, a donor may choose one DVD. These motion pictures are not available anywhere else and make unique gifts.

For more information visit  
[www.mbconf.ca/cmbs](http://www.mbconf.ca/cmbs) or  
[www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives/](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives/).

## Book Note

*By Abe Dueck*

*"Ihr Ende Schaut an...": Evangelische Maertyrer des 20. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Harald Schultze and Andreas Kurschat, assisted by Claudia Bendick (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006), 765 pp.

This massive volume consists of two main sections. The first is a series of twelve essays by various authors on diverse topics such as martyrs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, martyrdom according to evangelical (i.e. Protestant) understanding, Germans under Soviet repression, etc. The second documentary part consists of lists of martyrs in various regions, mainly Germany and the Soviet Union. A quick glance of the Soviet section reveals at least 25 "Mennonite" names, such as Bergen, Ediger, Rempel, etc. Some of these were or became Baptists or Adventists, but the majority of them were clearly Mennonites. Peter Letkemann wrote at least 7 of the accounts, and others were written by recognized Mennonite scholars such as Johannes Dyck and Herman Heidebrecht.

On the whole, this volume adds little to what is already known from works such as Aron Toews' *Mennonitische Maertyrer* and Helmut Huebert's, *1937: Stalin's Year of Terror*. The Mennonites included in the work are but a small sample of the many who died as a result of Soviet repression.

## More Book Reviews

Erica Jantzen, *Six Sugar Beets- Five Bitter Years* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2003), pb. 186 pp; *Sheer Survival: From Brazil to Kyrgystan* (Kitchener: by the author, 2007), pb., 321 pp; plus a translation, *In the Wilds of Turkestan: An Autobiography* by Hermann Jantzen (Waterloo: Waterpark Publishing, 2009), pb. 203 pp.

*Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein, former Mennonite Heritage Centre director, now living in Steinbach.*

These three volumes represent a significant historical and personal contribution by the author and editor, Erica Jantzen. Her 700- page output noted here is important not only for its basic

themes; it is also a timely commentary making more explicit and public an important but little known area of Muslim culture where Mennonites had a good chance to interact and communicate their values to a very different, sometimes hostile, but sometimes quite friendly, culture. In our day of growing Muslim contact with the West, Erica's work can be enlightening and instructive.

Erica drew much inspiration for the work from the fact that her forebears lived in the Talas Valley of Kyrgyzstan for some years – a Central Asian locality not usually cited in studies of Russian Mennonite literature and history. Kyrgyzstan is unknown for the most part among Western readers. As it happened, this reviewer connected earlier with this area when he learned of a fairly close relative, Father Vladimir Klippenstein, son of Jacob Klippenstein, becoming a priest of an Orthodox church in this region, and still serving there today.

The Herman Jantzen book has a useful map to make sense of all the place names found in these books. It is in fact a translation of a volume that first appeared in German as *Im Wilden Turkestan*. Herman Jantzen, one of the Claas Epp followers who remained out there till the Communists drove him and his wife out in the 1920s, was a most remarkable individual with a life story most interesting and significant in its own right -- daring, intrepid, resourceful, much a missionary in his later years, including time in The Netherlands, again showing how Christian and Muslim interaction can happen as a fruitful exchange in many ways.

The *Sheer Survival* volume details the immediate Jantzen family's 1929 long trek of leaving Kyrgyzstan for Brazil. Erica decided to go back there to learn more about her forebears and actually take up temporary employment as a teacher in the region. She immersed herself in the local culture giving her unique insights.

*Sugar Beets*, first published in German, is a tragic but overcoming Christian faith story of making it through five years of the Communist Gulag (Anne Kroeker, called Mia in the story, did that), a story of great courage, endurance and love, which makes it a poignant, historical biography that should be called a "must read".

As a teacher and excellent communicator Erica has also brought good translation to the project. The superb storytelling talent of the writer, makes this "trilogy" something delightfully new and inspirational at the same time. Attractive

covers, clear type, good editing, many interesting photos and quite fast-paced storytelling, should take one quickly to a bookstore to see if copies still exist for Christmas gifts that any reader will appreciate.

Marci McDonald, *The Armageddon Factor: The Rise of Christian Nationalism in Canada* (Toronto: Random House, 2010) hdc., 419pp., \$35.00.

Reviewed by John Dyck, Trinity Western University, Langley, B.C.

*The Armageddon Factor* by Marci McDonald is an important read for Canadians. Even Mennonites, who as a denomination are not part of her target, should take note of her claims. Written with an engaging style, Marci McDonald, a well-respected Canadian journalist, delves into the lives, public statements and organizations of certain prominent Canadian evangelical Christians with the intent of "discovering the smoking gun" evidence to support her contention that there is a committed effort on the part of evangelical Christian nationalists to fundamentally reshape Canadian Politics in a manner consistent with the 'foundational units of Christian government.' She argues that, contrary to popular opinion, there is a "Christian Right" in Canada, modeled on the American Christian Right which has the goal of reinstating core Christian principles into the public square. "In this country, where the CRTC has kept the reins on religious broadcasting and Catholics make up a larger proportion of the faith community, the emergent Christian right may look and sound different than its American counterpart, but in the five years since the prospect of same-sex marriage propelled evangelicals into political action, it has spawned a coalition of advocacy groups, think tanks and youth lobbies that have changed the national debate. (341)." McDonald links the current Conservative Harper Government to this growing Christian Right movement to restructure Canadian society. "[Stephen Harper] has used the enormous powers of his office to shift the ideological leanings of key institutions, from federal courts to federal regulatory agencies, toward a more socially conservative world view (353)." McDonald's argument is that Stephen Harper has appealed to the combining of the Canadian theo-conservative political constituency and the socio-economic conservative wings of his party in order to give

him a clear government majority. While to-date this strategy has not achieved his political goal, Marci McDonald warns that the momentum gained with the current conservative government is already achieving results for Christian Right activists. Secularists beware!

The success of McDonald's argument is dependent on the evidence she masses. While scrupulously listing her sources for each chapter: interviews with key "Christian Right" advocates, public statements in newspapers, journals and other group publications, and attending numerous public meetings of various right wing Christian groups like Teen Mania Canada, McDonald carefully screens her sources for all evidence which does not support her claims. Preston Manning is caricatured as a protégée of the American Leadership Institute, advising the Canadian conservative political elite how to be "as wise as serpents and harmless as doves," (108) in their public statements, schooling them through his "faith and politics weekend seminars held across the country. Marci portrays Manning as the conservative movement's "lofty patriarch, attempting to nudge the rambunctious members of his conservative clan toward reconciliation (111)." McDonald errs, not in fabricating statements from leaders she quotes; rather, McDonald errs when she dissects speeches, advocacy platforms, and rally chants, slipping catchy quotations into her descriptive analysis where they will create maximum alarm amongst her secularist readers. McDonald also is not clear in her definitions. The term 'Christian Right' is an umbrella word for all the Christians who alarm her sensibilities. They are distinguished from 'left-wing Christians like Mennonites,' and 'mainstream Christians' who she identifies with. Anyone who carries a Bible and claims that its message has immediate relevancy for Canadian politics becomes part of the Christian Right conspiracy to ultimately establish a Christian theocracy in Canada. McDonald overstates her case. *The Armageddon Factor* merits reading in spite of its apocalyptic overtones because, as McDonald points out: there is always a strong tension and tug-of-war between religion and politics in the public space whenever people of faith in any religion, argue that personal religious beliefs ought to affect outward behavior. In a pluralist democracy, personal religious convictions should be evident in people's lives in their day to day world.

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## Book Reviews

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Heinrich J. Willms, compiler and editor, *At the Gates of Moscow or God's Gracious Aid Through a Most Difficult and Trying Period*, translated by Dr. George G. Thielman (Abbotsford: Judson Lake House, Publishers, 2010), hdc., 267pp., \$50.00.

*Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein, former Mennonite Heritage Centre director.*

This volume is not only a historical publication, but has a history all its own. In 1960 it was published in Yarrow, B.C., by a Committee of Menno-nite Refugees, as documents compiled and edited by Heinrich J. Willms. The documents consisted largely of eye-witness accounts of persons who had been a part of the closing phase of the Mennonite emigration from the Soviet Union in the 1920s, i.e. the final years of 1929-30. The book appeared in 1964 as an English translation done by Dr. G.G. Thielman of Atlanta, Georgia. He also appended a section on Communism with study questions. A third stage of this project is this edition prepared by Selma Willms Turner and C.F. (Neil) Klassen, Judson Lake House Publishers of Abbotsford, B.C.

Sponsorship of this new undertaking is under the names of Dr. John and Mrs. Frances Willms and Mrs. Kathleen Willms Toews. They state the purpose as being "to commemorate the Eightieth Anniversary of the events told therein."

In this very beautiful hardbound coffee table edition one finds the fruit of a revision not so much of the text which has been corrected where necessary, but of the format, photo collection and side bar quotes, along with a total technologically quite advanced "remake" including a new foreword by Dr. John B. Toews, formerly of Regent College, Vancouver, B.C. With it can now be had a "handling" and reading experience that makes the book definitely worth another look even if you have read the earlier versions.

The story of those final years and indeed months of anxious waiting to see if a departure was still possible late in the 1920s, is relatively well known. However it has a Siberian side to it which is only dealt with somewhat sketchily, reflecting information then available. The map included for recalling the regions of Mennonite settlement in tsarist Russia does not include Siberia which had several very major Mennonites

settlements, begun around 1899, in place by then.

As already intimated the volume is a publishing coup. Bibliographical notes and an index have been added in this edition. A full list of original contributors, the eye-witnesses is included here also. The book gives tribute to dozens of leading and other individuals who played notable roles in making the Moscow exodus possible. If readers can identify persons on p.183 who now remain nameless, the story will be that much more complete.

The words of Neil Klassen (p. xi) fittingly pull together the strands of all efforts made to produce this commemorative work:

*"At the Gates of Moscow is not easy to read; the stories are often hard, mixing tragedy with joy, and the endings frequently are not resolved. Of such is life. But within these pages the reader will discover stories of courage, hope and God's faithfulness."*

*Woldemar Neufeld's Canada: A Mennonite Artist in the Canadian Landscape 1925-1995* edited by Laurence Neufeld and Monika McKillen, Text by Hildi Froese Tiessen and Paul Gerard Tiessen (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010) hdc., 152 pp., \$50.00.

*Reviewed by Ray Dirks, art curator, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg.*

Running against a common stereotype, Woldemar Neufeld grew up in an environment that encouraged him in his artistic pursuits. Born on November 10, 1909 in Waldheim, Molotschna Colony, Ukraine, Neufeld began his life in a prosperous Mennonite family. His grandfather, Isaak Johann Neufeld, founded a family-run farm implement factory in Waldheim, employing 300. Neufeld's father recognized his young son's talents and encouraged him in his drawing. Young Neufeld "took endless pleasure in drawing buildings and bridges, ships and trains..." (page 4).

World War I and the Russian Revolution threw Neufeld's lovely world into catastrophic disarray. In 1920 his father was executed. In 1923 his mother Eliese Reimer married recently widowed Jacob H. Janzen. Janzen was a well known teacher and preacher who was also a poet and playwright. "Unusually cosmopolitan for a Mennonite churchman," (page 17) he, too, encouraged Neufeld to hone his God given artistic gifts, even arranging for private art lessons.

In the fall of 1924 the blended family fled to Canada, settling in Waterloo.

Neufeld's step-father continued to help him follow his artistic path. This encouragement combined with Neufeld's endless curiosity and artistic ambition led to a decade of study in Kitchener-Waterloo and Toronto, to meetings with some of Canada's leading artists and to helping found the Art Society of Kitchener.

While loving the peace, stability and beauty of Waterloo County, Neufeld did not see his future unfolding there. In 1935 he moved to Ohio to further his studies at the Cleveland Institute of Art. He felt there was greater acceptance of young artists in the US and stayed. He lived in New York City for a few years and then moved to New Milford, Connecticut where he established a successful career into old age.

Canada, especially Waterloo County, remained close to Neufeld's heart throughout his life. He returned often. Where the Group of Seven, some of whom Neufeld met, escaped to the wilds of Canada, Neufeld retained his boyhood fascination for architecture and engineering. His art, typically, embraced nature but within a world where people had a creative hand. His buildings, winding country roads, tilled fields conjure landscape in harmony with what people have created in a potentially unforgiving environment. As well, recalling the destruction around him in his childhood, he wanted to document old buildings which might disappear. His Canadian inspired art, while only forming a part of his career, inspires nostalgic feelings and lovingly document his interaction with the country. But, most of all, it pays tribute to the Kitchener Waterloo area where his family found peace and a home. In 1974 Neufeld wrote, "... I thank God for having had the opportunity, then and now, of painting that extraordinary spot on this earth called Waterloo County." (page 12)

The first 52 pages of *Woldemar Neufeld's Canada: A Mennonite Artist in the Canadian Landscape, 1925-1995* tells Neufeld's story, with a liberal sprinkling of personal photos and artworks. The remaining nearly 100 pages are dominated by Neufeld's art, primarily oils, watercolours and block prints. It is a beautifully realized book offering a revealing visit with a man who loved the place that gave a Mennonite boy the opportunity to become an artist.