

Mennonite Historian

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



Turnhill church building in 2011. Photo courtesy of Gregory Melle, Surrey, BC.

Turnhill Church at Beaverflats

by Kate Woltmann

In the fall of 2013, the Centre for MB Studies in Winnipeg received a visitor. Arnold Dyck from Saskatchewan came to deliver a most precious find—two record books containing the minutes of Bethania Mennonite Brethren Church, a small station church located 8.5 miles from Main Centre, Saskatchewan. The books were in fine shape, one having been rebound to reflect its original appearance. Inside were neatly organized minutes, mostly written in German Gothic script. The minutes spanned the entire history of the church—from its conception in 1913 to its conclusion in 1970.

Alongside this treasure trove of information, Arnold enlisted Doyle Klassen, Irmgard Seidel, and Susie Harms to participate in the painstaking task of translating the minutes from German to English. The result was a 208-page manuscript, complete with an index,

foreword, and translator's note. This translated manuscript provides a rare insight into life on the Saskatchewan prairies in the early 20th century, and the humble beginnings of a Mennonite Brethren station church.¹

Like many churches, Bethania MB Church began with a calling. In 1912, Johann W. Neufeld of Main Centre, Saskatchewan, felt called to plant a church for those who were unable to travel to the larger churches of Main Centre, Herbert, and Swift Current. The idea was presented to the Bethel Church of Main Centre, where Johann was a member. After prayer and careful consideration, it was decided in 1913 that a station church was to be created in the Turnhill School district—also known as Beaverflats.

In January 1913, the new station church

(cont'd on p. 2)

A Clock's Story

by Esther Epp-Tiessen

Although I have always been a lover of history, I only recently became curious about my own family story and the journey that my grandparents made to Canada from the Soviet Union in the 1920s. My interest was piqued this summer when I became the caretaker of the old Kroeger clock that has been in my mother's family for several generations.

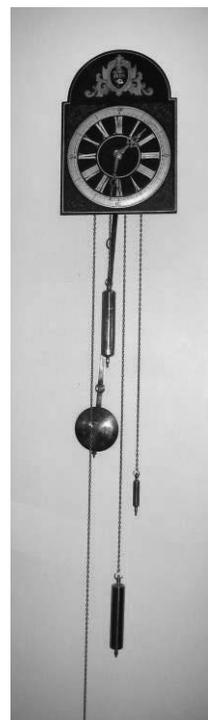
From my childhood, I remember the old clock hanging in my grandparents' dining room in Leamington, Ontario, faithfully tick-tocking the minutes and chiming the hours of the day. Our family made a road trip to Leamington almost every summer from our home in Manitoba to visit Grossmama and Grosspapa Dick, as well as aunts, uncles, and cousins. Imprinted on my memory about those visits are: Grossmama's heavy rye bread, the wide China bowls out of which we slurped our cabbage borscht, and the faithful tick-tock of the Kroeger clock just next to the oak dining room table.

My sisters and I always slept upstairs at Grossmama and Grosspapa's, directly above the dining room. A floor grate allowed us to peer down into the dining room long after we should have been asleep. I recall watching my parents sharing evening devotions every night with Grossmama and Grosspapa before going to bed. They would read some scripture and then kneel on the floor to say a prayer. After devotions, my grandfather would rise from the floor and wind the Kroeger clock by lifting the heavy brass weights to their highest point, so that they could begin another twenty-four hour journey down to the floor.

When my grandparents died, the clock became the

Kroeger clock.

Photo courtesy of Esther Epp-Tiessen.



Clock Story

(cont'd from p. 1)

possession of my aunt Agatha Dick who never married and lived with her parents all her life. When she became ill and needed to move to a nursing home, her siblings drew lots. My mother, Helen Dick Epp, really wanted the clock, but her brother, Jacob Dick of Vineland, Ontario, drew the lot. Uncle Jake cared for the clock until he moved to London, Ontario, a short time ago. He offered it to one of his nieces or nephews. It eventually came into my possession, and my husband Dan and I brought it back to Winnipeg with us this past summer.

When we arrived in Winnipeg, we wondered what to do with it. The clock was in several pieces and we didn't know how to put it together or hang it. With assistance from Conrad Stoesz at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, we contacted Arthur Kroeger, descendent of the Kroeger clockmakers, restorer of clocks, and author of *Kroeger Clocks* (Mennonite Heritage Village, 2012). Mr. Kroeger lovingly fixed a broken piece, restored the peeling dial face, and showed us how to hang and care for the heavy clock. He also inscribed in beautiful gold lettering on the back, the name of his great-grandfather, patriarch of the clockmakers, David D. Kroeger, Rosenthal, Chortitza.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ISSN 07008066

Mr. Kroeger asked me to provide the clock's story to add to his database of known Kroeger clocks in North America. I knew that the clock had been manufactured in 1898, because the date was clearly painted on the dial face, but I knew little else. I turned to my mother, my Uncle Jake, and Connie Wiebe at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, for information.

I learned the clock originally belonged to my great-grandmother Katharina Warkentin, born 1863 in Rueckenau, Molotschna, and her first husband, Nicolai Abram Driedger, born 1861. They were married in December 1884 and lived in Schoenfeld colony. They had three sons and three daughters, two of whom died at a young age. The youngest daughter, who survived to adulthood, was my grandmother Maria Driedger. The Driedgers were a well-to-do family, as many of the Schoenfeld Mennonites were. This is no doubt the reason why Nicolai and Katharina were able to purchase the Kroeger clock. Clocks like theirs, with the hourly chime, were twice as expensive as clocks without the chime mechanism.

Nicolai Driedger died very suddenly in 1906 and the following year Katharina married a man named Johann Cornies. The clock accompanied her to her new home on the Wiesenhof estate. During the war, she and daughter Maria managed the estate because Johann was already in failing health and all the young men were conscripted into the medical service in lieu of military service. Johann died soon after. With the revolution and terror that followed the war, the family suffered like those around them. I know few specifics except that a stepson of Katharina, Peter Cornies, was shot and killed by anarchists; my grandmother Maria is the one who discovered his body. Maria and my grandfather, Abram J. Dick, were married in August 1919 and their "honeymoon" was a flight to Molotschna, to escape from the raids of Machnovists. Great-grandmother Katharina Warkentin Driedger Cornies presumably accompanied them, as it was custom for widows to live with the youngest daughter. Katharina and the family lost their land and most of their possessions at Wiesenhof, but she managed to keep the Kroeger clock.

My grandparents, Abram and Maria Dick, their two daughters, and my great-grandmother Katharina arrived in Canada in 1924. They boarded for some months with the family of Nathan Clemmer near

Waterloo, Ontario. Looking for farm work, they moved first to Newton Siding, Manitoba, then to Pelee Island in Lake, Ontario, and finally to the Leamington area around 1934. They were very poor. Abram worked as a sharecropper earning only a dollar a day. Oldest daughter Kaethe, who loved to read, had to quit school and work alongside her father. Two young children died because there was no money for a doctor. My grandmother Maria struggled with depression, probably because of the many losses she had experienced.

As the Depression ended, the family's situation gradually improved. Grosspapa was overjoyed when in 1937 he made the final payment on the family's *Reiseschuld*. In 1939 he purchased a black Dodge car, and around 1945 he was able to purchase a small farm, twenty years after arriving in Canada. Other children in the family, including my mother Helen, were able to complete high school and more. Around 1957 Grossmama and Grosspapa purchased a house on Wigle Street in Leamington. It was this house that I visited as a young child and where I first became acquainted with the old Kroeger clock.

The clock now marks time in my dining room in Winnipeg. Arthur Kroeger told me it is in excellent condition and could continue to count the minutes and hours for many decades to come. As I listen to the steady, patient tick-tock, I think about the journey this amazing clock has made in its 115-year lifetime and the journey of my mother's family over the generations. I recall the prayers spoken by my grandparents on bended knee as the clock kept time nearby. Despite their many losses, they were deeply grateful for their life. As I listen to the clock tick, my heart is also filled with thanks.

Turnhill

(cont'd from p. 1)

in Turnhill experienced its first revival. Cornelius N. Hiebert (1881-1975), a traveling Bible salesman or colporteur from the USA, visited the small prairie district and conducted evangelistic meetings that resulted in 14 people deciding to become Jesus followers. The number of members for the Turnhill district church rose to 43 members within its first couple of weeks.

It became clear that a church building was required. Due to changes within the education system, the Turnhill district

(cont'd on p. 9)

Genealogy and Family History

West Prussian Property Records

by Glenn Penner, Guelph, Ontario
(gpenner@uoguelph.ca)

Property and inheritance records are important sources for genealogical and historical studies. Unfortunately for Low German Mennonites, the earliest West Prussian records are in Polish archives and have been difficult to access. An early use of these records is found in B.H. Unruh's classic book on the immigration from Prussia to Russia: *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*.

Unknown, or unnoticed, by the many researchers who have used Unruh's book are the many references to "Hyp. Beil. Akten" in the extensive lists of immigrants. These are the *Hypotheken Beilagen Akten*, which were thoroughly researched by Franz Harder of Danzig. The information he obtained was provided to Unruh. Unfortunately, all of Harder's collection was destroyed or went missing after his death towards the end of World War II.

As a result of the partition of Poland in 1772, most Mennonites ended up living in West Prussia, a province of the Kingdom of Prussia (Frederick the Great was king at the time). In 1783, the Prussian *Hypotheken Ordnung* initiated standardized recording of property and inheritance records. Village *Grundbücher* and *Grundakten* were started. A *Grundbuch* is a large ledger of about 400–600 pages containing information on about 20 to 30 properties. A *Grundakt* is a file, or dossier, containing information on a particular property.

Many of these records have survived and are located in Polish archives. The first part of the project to make these records available was funded by the Plett Foundation. It concentrated on the extensive collection in the archives at Malbork, Poland, formerly Marienburg, West Prussia. These records cover villages which belonged to the Mennonite congregations of Bärwalde/Fürstenerwerder, Tiegenhagen, Ladekopp, Rosenort, Heubuden, Elbing/Ellerwald, Orloff-erfelde, Tiensdorf/Marcushof, and Tragheimerweide.

In May 2012, I travelled to Poland and spent one week in the Malbork archives identifying pre-1830s property belonging to Mennonites. Since an index was available for only the Tragheimerweide area villages, each *Grundbuch* and *Grundakt* from outside that area had to be searched for Mennonite property owners. I repeated this process in May 2013. As a result, about 11,000 good quality digital images are now available online at the website:

http://mla.bethelks.edu/metadata/VL_53.html.

So far about ¾ of the "Mennonite" property records in the Malbork archives have been copied. In addition to the Malbork records, there is a significant collection of property records in the archives at Bydgoszcz (Bromberg) and Torun (Torn). These cover the Mennonite congregations of Schönsee, Montau, and Pzechowka. Acquisition of the remaining property records depends on future funding of this project.

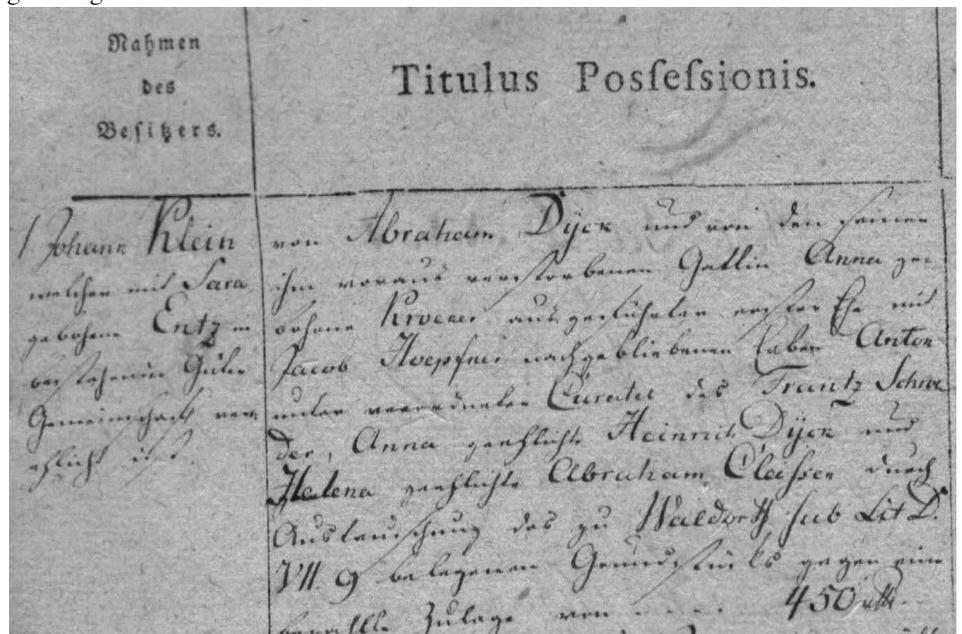
Although these records are a genealogical goldmine, there are some limitations. These are not church registers or census lists. You will not find nice, neat lists of names and dates, nor will you find any reliable indices. You will need to carefully search the pages of the records for the village of interest in order to find the person you are looking for. This is part of doing real historical and genealogical research!

The records are written in a rather legal style of 18th- and 19th-century German. Even those with some knowledge of German may find it difficult to decipher the terminology and work out the often complex relationships described in these documents. One should also keep in mind that, by the time these records were started, at least a quarter of all Mennonite families in West Prussia were landless and therefore would not be included in property records.

In addition, at least one half of the property records have disappeared. This seems to have happened around the end, or just after World War II. For example, page 301 of Unruh's book mentions that my own great-, great-, great-, great-grandfather, Heinrich Penner, is found in property records from Zeyersvorderkampen. Unfortunately, no property records earlier than 1928 have survived for Zeyersvorderkampen. In some cases entire villages are missing, such as Rosenort in the Gross Werder.

It is important to note that husband and wife were joint owners of a property. As a result, the maiden names of wives are provided (something rarely done in many Prussian Mennonite church records). Also, all legitimate children had equal inheritance rights (unlike in some European countries). So, if a husband or wife died while owning a property, all of the living children and children of deceased children of that person (not step-

(cont'd on p. 9)



Grundbuch for Klein Mausdorferweide, Blatt 1. State Archives of Malbork, Poland, Fond 341, File 354. This *Grundbuch* is not yet online.



Home Bible Study group in the Caucasus, Kuban. LtoR: Abe Martens, unknown, Pankratz, J. Dyck, John Kroeker, Engrecht, David Reimer, Johann J. Toews, Helene Friesen, Helene Mann, Marichen Jash, Marichen Lepp, Katharina Giesbrecht, Jakob Schmorrr, Martha Schmorrr, unknown, and unknown.

Susan Unruh photograph collection, CMBS, Winnipeg (NP124-01-2).

Minister Johann Toews. He has Conquered!

by Harold Jantz

(Harold Jantz is translating articles from the Mennonitische Rundschau 1929–1930 for a book project. The following article is a sample of those that appeared in that period. It is a lengthy eulogy to Johann Toews (eighth from the left in photo), a significant Mennonite leader still in Russia at that time, written with the assumption that reports of his death after arrest in Moscow were true. The Toews family was among thousands of Mennonites who descended on Moscow in late 1929 in an attempt to flee the Soviet Union. In fact, Johann was not dead, though this was not yet known to the MR editor, Hermann Neufeld. Instead, he was exiled to northern Russia, where he died in 1933, accompanied to his grave by another Mennonite minister and a Muslim imam. A highly gifted, literate, and deeply spiritual Christian, Johann wrote many letters and even poetry from exile that reflected on his experience of suffering, his readings in the Bible, and his connection with God and other believers. The article indicates the high regard with which Rev. Johann Toews was held by many. Ed.)

Mennonitische Rundschau 26 Feb 1930 p. 9 col. 1.

“Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children” (Rev. 21:7).

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested . . . Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

According to a report that came to us [at the *Rundschau*] from the Immigration

Board in Rosthern, Sask., our beloved brother, the Minister Johann Toews of Ignatjevka, Russia, along with other faithful brethren, had to endure a martyr death.

“Rosthern, Sask. 23 Jan. 1930. Just received the news from G.S. Derksen of Herbert, Sask., that his brother D. Derksen of Arkadak, *Aeltester* Toews from Ignatyevka, *Aeltester* Jacob Rempel from Gruenfeld and still another *Aeltester* were shot in Moscow. May God comfort those related.”

The effect these words had on the editor is impossible to describe. In his many letters, our dear brother Johann repeatedly assured us of his longing to warmly greet us; his last lines to us on 26 October expressed again the joy of a reunion. Indeed, that reunion in the presence of the Father of Lights will be far more glorious than any here on earth. Even so, our hearts bleed and we feel broken inside; from year to year we had hoped this joy would be granted us this side of eternity. But . . . “the Lord is just in all His ways, and kind in all His doings” (Ps. 145:17). The name of the Lord be praised.

In the midst of our anguish, we are nonetheless thankful. As unshakeable witness to the gospel, brother Johann was able to carry the testimony of the Cross into the Rome of the Soviet government, Moscow. We may never discover all he had to endure, but from letters we are informed that he went through a three-hour interrogation in Moscow, where he may well have given his final testimony

for his Lord. And, as the report indicates, the Reds themselves were struck at how steadfast he remained; they finally declared, “He can’t be persuaded!” We believe our dear brother literally experienced what our Saviour assures us of in Matt. 10:19.

We still do not have the details, don’t know either whether we will soon receive more. On Sunday morning, we received from Germany a letter from the family of the dear brother. They had been transferred from Hammerstein to Prenzlau. There, this family finds itself placed along with two others in one room, as a thousand other emigrants have also been given shelter. Now, the thought is that if Canada won’t open the door to them, they will be sent to Brazil. Doctors have declared the brother’s family healthy; and accordingly, they should qualify to gain entrance to Canada, where many of their former friends and neighbours would be prepared to receive them with open arms.

The letter relates that brother Johann and his family got ready to make the journey to Moscow within two days. There, the brother was thrown into jail in November; his two grown-up sons had left money and clean clothes for him. His passage had also been paid, but they weren’t allowed any contact with their father. Johann wasn’t able to offer any sign of life either. He remained totally separated from his family and they left for Germany without him. The letter was written 9 January and shows that our sister-in-law still didn’t know anything about the execution of her spouse. She had still been given the hope that among the imprisoned, those with families abroad would be released rather than the others.

Some friends of our brother might be interested in a brief overview of the deceased’s life. Although we might not be able to cite many dates, we can mention the broad outlines of his life here.

Johann J. Toews was born 25 June 1877 in the village of Fabrikerwiese, Taurida. After the parents had moved to Muntau with their six children, brother Johann finished his village school education. He attended the Central School in Halbstadt and also took teacher training there, passing the teacher’s examination in Berdyansk. For 13 years he occupied a teacher’s role in Molotschna colony villages. Because he was gifted and felt the call of God to work as a minister of the gospel, he was elected and ordained as a minister by the church in Petershagen.



Johann J. Toews, 1877-1933.

The spiritual condition of the church was such, however, that in his work the dear brother soon broke through the boundaries of the old forms and preached as God's Word and the Holy Spirit inspired

him to do.

As a result, Rev. Johann Toews was release from that pulpit, and although his "new teaching" was not wanted there [in Petershagen], they weren't able to take from him his calling by God. He soon received numerous invitations from other churches that had been spiritually renewed and, as far as we can tell from letters of that time, the brother and his spouse joined the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1908.

From Tiegengagen, where Johann served as teacher for a number of years, he moved on 20 May 1908 to Memrik, where he lived in Bahndorf. He evangelized freely, though later he led churches in the Kuban and again in Memrik. It was his Bible conferences, however, that really lent flavour to his spiritual ministry. He enjoyed great blessing in many circles as a teacher of spiritual life courses; the Lord was present and people were converted in many places. As recently as 21 July 1929, and as a result of his evangelistic work, 49 persons were baptized.

Johann was a born warrior in the life of the church; church forms—fossilized orthodoxy, as he called it—he would attack again and again. Certainly it resulted in severe struggles, enemies, persecution; yet as a gardener in the Lord's garden, he was able to help remove many a weed.

Adding to his struggles in the spiritual realm, there was danger from the outside: specific warnings came from the government concerning spiritual activism. It has already been three years since the bloodhounds of a socialistic Russia first began coming after Johann's life. He was often brought into court. The secret police repeatedly tortured him terribly and threatened him; but it was impossible for him to simply fold his hands in his lap and yield to the influence of communism. In the fall of 1928, he wrote: "The signs

appear to indicate they want to totally strangle us, to choke off every spiritual breath; it feels as though we are dealing with the last diabolical attack of the enemy of God. Still, with many tears and a heavy heart filled with longing, we stand firm. Our settled hope is fixed on God: 'His veiled glory will not hide Him from us,' for 'the unfolding of His love will go far beyond all thought and understanding.'"

Thus, the "heavenly smelter" prepared this witness of our time in the cauldron of suffering, the flames always growing stronger, the object of His cleansing always purer. In a letter he wrote in summer 1929, he explained as follows: "A profound knowledge of Jesus will be lived out more in and through our recognition of the power of His resurrection, going deeper and deeper into the 'fellowship of His suffering'; this is probably where we now find ourselves. Soon will follow as a consequence, imitating Him in His death, suffering *for* the Lord and, most gloriously, *with* the Lord. But for the 'faithful unto death,' the crown of life beckons. In this is our only one real achievement, to be able thus to die."

Brother Johann had already tried to emigrate with his family a number of years ago, but it didn't appear to be the will of his Master. When so many Mennonites left for Canada, he saw it as his duty to remain with "the herd," since so many churches had already lost their spiritual caregivers. The Lord also richly blessed his effectiveness during these brief years. Despite the increasingly threatening storm clouds on his horizon, he threw himself ever more zealously into a torrent of activity for the Lord. This attitude put the brother and sister into total dependence on the grace of God.

Concerning the struggle, Johann wrote: "This forces us to breathe the rare sunny air of pure faith. Nothing else mixed in, our eyes looking only to Him, into the light. Everything else must fade, lest we place our trust in part on Him and in part on the creation [ourselves]." Even though he was close to a nervous collapse, as he wrote, the Lord did not allow it to happen and protected him until he was brought before the highest court, and there laid down his portfolio by testifying with his own blood, entering "into the joy of his Lord."

The "eternity-bound" brother lost both his parents in the fall of 1898. The summer of that same year, he was married

to Miss Susanna Wiens of Bytschock. Nine children were born to them, but seven of them passed away. The eldest son, who carried his father's name, died during the time of terror as a grown-up youth. The family, who are now in Germany, thus consists of his spouse and two sons, Peter and Willibald; in addition, she is accompanied by an adopted daughter, Euphrosine; all are adults. The three sisters of the brother likewise died during the Revolution. Another brother, Jakob, lives in Winnipeg, and the youngest brother, W.J. Toews, lives in Mountain Lake, Minn. Rev. Johann Toews was 52 years old in June.

May Johann's life and those of his fellow sufferers bring glory to the Most High and even now result in the salvation of many souls. May his testimony also spur us as children of God to closer fellowship with the Lord, so that if our time should come, we would also remain faithful unto death. In a few years anti-Christian forces in this land might also unfold in such a way that we could be tested, whether we are truly grounded on the rock of salvation or whether our house is built on sand.

Katie Funk Wiebe 2014 Research Grant

The Historical Commission of the U.S. and Canadian Mennonite Brethren Churches announces an "Open Research Grant" of \$1,500 to promote research and publication on the history and contributions of Mennonite Brethren women around the world. The Grant is made possible by generous support from the Katie Funk Wiebe Fund. Projects may include, but are not limited to, books, articles, lecture series, symposia, and multi-media presentations. To apply, send the following materials by **April 4, 2014**, to Jon Isaak (jisaak@mbconf.ca), Executive Secretary, Historical Commission, 1310 Taylor Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 3Z6: a two- or three-page summary of the project, stating its significance to the field of Mennonite Brethren women's studies, a budget of anticipated expenses, a vitae, and one letter of recommendation. Recipients of the award will be announced on June 2, 2014, following the annual meeting of the Historical Commission. Disbursements will be made June 9, 2014. The Prize Selection Committee may choose not to award the grant, if none of the applications is deemed acceptable. See www.mbhhistory.org for more information.



Mennonite Brethren
**HISTORICAL
COMMISSION**



**Mennonite
Heritage
Centre**

600 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4

Fundraising Evening

On Friday, November 22, 2013, the Mennonite Heritage Centre hosted its first fundraising evening. Archivist Conrad Stoesz spoke briefly about his work and the priorities of the archives; and Director Corey Dyck explained the context and need for holding a fundraising evening. However, the main attraction was the opportunity to hear from both Charlotte Penner and Betty Reimer of the *Mennonite Girls Can Cook* cookbooks and taste some of their recipes. Their “kitchen conversation” about hospitality, with helpful personal stories, added to the program. Dave Bergen, the executive minister of Mennonite Church Canada, spoke a blessing and then the 58 guests began enjoying appetizer and dessert recipes made from the two cookbooks! As people visited, many took the opportunity to tour the art exhibits and look inside the archive vault. Comments from participants indicate that the MHC fundraiser was well received. Watch for it again next year!

Corey Dyck

Mennonites and Ukrainians under Stalin

by Conrad Stoesz

“No person or group is all good or all bad. We all have the capabilities of both.” This how Clint Curle of the Canadian Museum for Human rights concluded the symposium, “Mennonites and Ukrainians under Stalin: Our Human Rights, Lost and Found.” For the event over 200 people crowded into the Mennonite Heritage Centre on October 28, 2013, and later enjoyed the food provided by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress.

The evening coincided with a month of events commemorating the Ukrainian Holdomor, the genocidal famine in Ukraine, 1932–1933. The symposium brought the Ukrainian and Mennonite communities together to reflect on the difficult challenges that both communities experienced during the times of revolution, famine, and war in Ukraine through the early decades of the 20th



Conrad Stoesz speaking at the fundraising evening. Photo courtesy of Deb Froese.

century. Organizers noted that this kind of cross-cultural dialogue was rare and emphasized that the point was not to determine who suffered more, but to share the remembered experiences and to mark the gratitude for life in Canada.

Four engaging presentations comprised the evening’s agenda. Peter Letkemann spoke about the years 1917–1923, detailing the lawlessness in Ukraine that followed the Russian Revolution in 1917. During that chaotic time, groups of bandits stole, pillaged, raped, and massacred men, women, and children in many of the Mennonite villages and estates. For 20 years, Letkemann has been collecting the names of Mennonites who starved to death, were exiled, or were executed by the bandits and later the Soviet regime. The database now lists over 20,000 names. As the Bolsheviks began to implement new measures to collectivize the farms and estates, the Mennonites began to organize emigration. Russian officials saw the emigration as a way of easing resistance to the confiscation of farms and land. Between 1923 and 1930, over 20,000 Mennonites immigrated to Canada.

Colin Neufeldt’s presentation traced the time period from 1929 to 1940. This was the period in which Stalin called for the kulak class of

citizens to be liquidated. Kulaks were people who owned land and/or businesses and who were therefore seen as a threat to the communist order that Stalin wanted to create. Into the hierarchy of the Soviet political structure, some Mennonites were recruited in order to help Stalin implement “dekulakization.” These Mennonite recruits helped to identify who the kulaks were and often became part of sentencing their own village members into exile or to execution. Those exiled to Siberia and beyond were used as cheap labour in work camps designed to hasten the country’s progress toward industrialization.

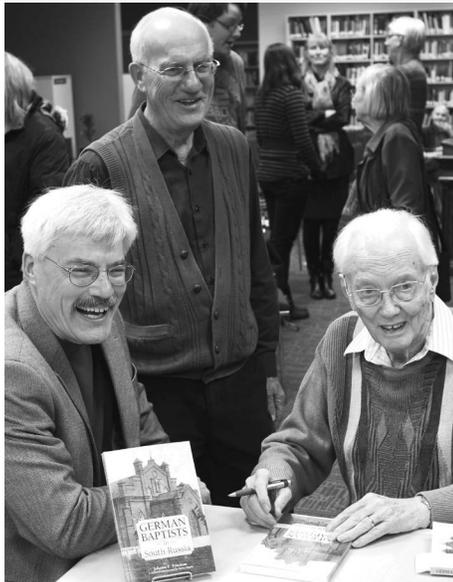
Neufeldt’s recent research in Ukraine’s Soviet-era archives revealed that in the Khortitsa area, a certain Wilms, Quiring, and Rempel were three of the highest-ranking Mennonites in the Soviet system tasked with filling the quota of kulaks to be liquidated. Reporting to them were many other Mennonites, including women who also worked as “cogs in the Soviet bureaucratic machinery.” However, by the end of 1938, even Wilms, Quiring, and Rempel were exiled or executed by Stalin’s communist enterprise. Why would Mennonites be involved in the liquidation of their own people? Neufeldt suggested that these apparent “traitors” might also be seen as victims of Stalin’s “Great Terror.” For while motivations were probably multiple, at the very least they also were desperately trying to escape Stalin’s destructive policies in order to protect their immediate families. But in the end, they also were destroyed. Once again the sobering reality emerged that it is not possible to label one group or person all good and another all bad.¹

Sisters Valerie Cobb-Friesen and Ellen Cobb-Friesen brought a human face to the hardships and the triumphs of the human

(cont’d on p.9)



Friesen-Kuzmenko family (LtoR): Valerie Cobb-Friesen, Katharina Friesen, and Ellen Cobb-Friesen. Photo courtesy of Conrad Stoesz.



Book launch (LtoR): Jon Isaak, Abe J. Dueck, and Walter Regehr. Photo courtesy of Conrad Stoesz.

Book Launch

On November 19, 2013, 45 people gathered in the CMBS library to celebrate a major accomplishment of Walter Regehr—the publication of the translation of Johann E. Pritzkau’s Baptist history, *Geschichte der Baptisten in Südrussland* (1914). The book documents the collaborative relations between German Baptists and Mennonite Brethren in 19th-century Russia.

After Walter shared his experience working on the project and read several selections, Prof. Abe J. Dueck situated Pritzkau’s Baptist history within the context of Mennonite Brethren history and Prof. Albert W. Wardin spoke about the significance of the Baptist and Mennonite Brethren cooperation. Albert, a Baptist historian, traveled from Nashville, Tennessee, to Winnipeg specifically to attend the book launch.

The genesis of the book project began in 2003, when Heinrich Loewen, then CMBS Director, asked retired educator Walter Regehr if he would be willing to take on another German translation project. Walter had just finished a lengthy project, translating *The Mennonites in Russia from 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents* (1975). Thankfully, Walter agreed to translate the Pritzkau book!

German Baptists in South Russia was one of several translation projects that Heinrich had initiated, putting CMBS people and resources toward the translation of important German works that situate the birth and development of the Mennonite Brethren Church. While

Pritzkau’s focus is Baptist history, he also documents the relationship between the German Baptists and Mennonite Brethren in South Russia. A Baptist “insider,” Pritzkau sets out the integral role Mennonite Brethren evangelists had in the formation of the German Baptist churches of South Russia.

Once again, Walter devoted himself to the monumental task, spending the better part of two years on the translation. He completed the first draft in 2004. The skill required to translate the German syntax and lengthy sentences is truly remarkable. Thank you, Walter!

After several years of dormancy, the manuscript moved speedily toward publication in 2012, thanks to several key people. Susan Huebert constructed the comprehensive subject and name indices. Abe J. Dueck and Ed Lenzmann carefully read the page proofs and offered numerous helpful suggestions. Baptist historian Albert Wardin helped to identify several of Pritzkau’s cryptic references, including Bro. C. (Efim Cymbol) and Bro. K. (J. Kowlasky), and the references to German Lutheran and Catholic villages where German Baptist congregations formed. William Schroeder, along with the published maps of Karl Stumpp, also helped me to identify the locations of these villages. I did the final editing and set the page layout, making it print-ready with the good counsel of Elenore Doerksen from Kindred Productions, who agreed to publish the book. And special thanks goes to graphic artist Audrey Plew, for making the excellent maps from my “penciled in” village locations and for designing an attractive book cover.

Our hope is that *German Baptists in South Russia* (2013) will prove a useful resource, both for remembering the nature of Baptist interaction with Mennonite Brethren, and for charting subsequent versions of the ongoing story of collaboration. The book is available from Kindred Productions at a cost of \$20 (includes GST).

Appreciation dinner

Also on November 19, 2013, prior to the book launch, CMBS held its annual volunteer appreciation dinner. Helen Schellenberg catered the event with Russian Mennonite food (holubsti, vereniki, farmer sausage, cream gravy, fried onions, rhubarb sauce) along with a green salad and a dessert of fruit crisp and ice cream. The dinner honored the work

of eight volunteers: Susan Huebert, Ed Lenzmann, Bill Schroeder, Augusta Schroeder, Clara Toews, Lois Wedel, Kathie Ewert, and Walter Regehr. These volunteers offer varying amounts of time each month and help with filing, sorting, cataloging, keyboard entry, translation, data migration, mailings, etc. If you would like to join this volunteer group, helping with the work of the archives, please contact CMBS.

Other news

The personal papers of William “Bill” Schroeder (1927–2012) have now been processed and described. Also, the Saskatchewan Conference institutional records were updated, following Conference Minister Ralph Gliege’s donation of six boxes of congregational records from the last twenty years. The finding aids for both the Schroeder personal papers and the Saskatchewan Conference have been uploaded to the new CMBS website, which is currently in its final stages of construction. The new website should be live early 2014.

Jake K. Balzer of Calgary has completed the translation of a novel written by Rev. Peter P. Dueck (1908–1995) in 1938 at Headingly, Manitoba. The manuscript, written in fine Gothic cursive script in four journals or *Hefts*, was donated to CMBS by Peter’s son, Bill Dueck some years ago. Bill remembers his father as a prolific story teller and writer. This manuscript—which turns out to be a romance novel—is the only one that survived an attic fire on the property some years ago. In the next issue of MH, watch for Jake’s summary of the plot of the novel and a description of its main characters.

The 2013 archival internship and research grant were so well received that they are again being offered in 2014. For more information, see notices in this edition of MH and at www.mbhistory.org.

Jon Isaak

Remembering the Great Trek (1943–1945)

by Jon Isaak

It was a memorable Klassen “fest.” On October 20, 2013, at Sargent Ave. Mennonite Church, 121 people gathered for a showing of Otto Klassen’s documentary film, *The Great Trek*. The event was enhanced by Otto’s presence (now at 86 years of age) and the release of his memoir, *I Remember* (2013). Otto was honored for his contribution to preserving and promoting the legacy of the Mennonite people, their faith and their story. The presence of Otto’s children and their children made the evening a memorable event for all those gathered.

On the occasion of Otto’s 80th birthday, Peter Letkemann wrote about Otto’s craftsmanship as a filmmaker and as an advocate of Mennonite faith. A few paragraphs from that larger essay serve to highlight the significance of Otto’s work.

“I first got to know Otto Klassen as a master bricklayer and stone mason . . . In retrospect, it seems to me that Otto was able to visualize the entire wall in his mind even before he laid the first brick—it was all done in his head, it just required careful and patient work to complete physically. These walls and chimneys are still standing all over North Kildonan, East Kildonan and other parts of [Winnipeg], and if you look at them you will see that all the lines, both horizontal and vertical, are perfect—Otto is a perfectionist!

“I got to know Otto Klassen the film director in 1992, when I saw what is



Book launch. Otto Klassen. Photo courtesy of Lorraine Krywy.

probably his masterpiece, *The Great Trek*. When I read the film credits, I was amazed, but not surprised, to see that Otto was not only the producer and director of the film; he also wrote the script, edited the film and even chose the music for the soundtrack.

“As a filmmaker Otto exhibits the same dedication, hard work, skill, attention to detail, careful preparation, and long-range planning that he had displayed as a master mason.

“Otto felt that he had survived [Stalin’s Communism] for a reason; it was his responsibility to tell the story of the Mennonite people—of the suffering and hardships they endured, of their cultural and economic achievements, and above all of their faith. Given his skills and talents, he felt that he could best do this through the medium of film.”¹

Now, with the release of his memoir, *I Remember*, Otto’s own Great Trek story is accessible in print. Otto begins by recalling the happy days of his youth in Schoeneberg, Ukraine; and then he tells his story of dislocation during Stalin’s Communism and World War II, a story of relentless pursuit to find his family and freedom.

Otto’s memoir recounts the hardships created by the NKVD (Soviet law enforcement agency) during the collectivization of farms, starting in 1929. Then, when the German forces advanced and occupied Ukraine (1941–1943), relative calm was re-established. Otto, at age 16, was invited to continue his education in a special German-run school, studying leadership, literature, and history. Following his training, he served as a translator.

After the defeat of Germany by allied forces in 1945 and his escape from detention, Otto traveled 800 km through allied-controlled parts of Germany, at substantial risk, to locate his mother and three younger siblings in the Russian-occupied partition of Germany (his father had already perished and his older brother was missing). Otto’s aim was to find his family and move them out of the Soviet partition, before they were forcibly repatriated to the USSR. This he managed to do, relying on his innovative thinking, the support of many farmers and villagers along the way, and his abiding conviction that God’s presence was with him.

Eventually, along with several thousand other Russian Mennonites refugees fleeing Stalin’s Communism following World War II, Otto and his family

gathered in the port city of Bremerhaven, North Germany. They became part of a deal brokered by the Mennonite Central Committee and the Dutch Government: to transport the refugees to Paraguay, where they could live in freedom. The following paragraphs from Otto’s memoir describe the voyage of the 2,303 refugees on the Dutch ship, the *Volendam*.

“As I watched the refugees walking up the ramp, some thoughts and images from the past came back to me. I saw the once strong and prosperous Mennonite settlements in Russia totally disintegrate. Thousands of men—sons, fathers, grandfathers—had been carried off by the Bolsheviks to the Gulag or the endless forests of Siberia. Their fate remained unknown, but a few survivors spoke of the unbearable existence the exiled people had to face every day. Torture and hard labour were used to break their spirit and reduce them to a heap of skeletal beings. Some of those who managed to escape were now aboard the *Volendam*.

“When I spoke to some of the people as they boarded, they expressed words of gratitude for the help they had experienced in recent times, which had been bleak and threatening. Others, when asked about a husband, father, or son, responded with tears in their eyes, although a spark of hope seemed to cross their lips when they asked: ‘Will we ever be united with our loved ones? Are we now moving farther away from them? God can miraculously intervene again, can’t He?’ Of course, many of those exiled would never return—tortured or starved to death, or executed for no reason at all. . . .

“Those on board leaned against the railing and waved a final goodbye. We thanked God as the distance increased between us and Stalin’s Communism. It was indescribable to know that we would soon be as far as possible from that merciless regime, although we knew that the memories and scars would linger for many years to come.”²

Both Otto’s *Great Trek* two-part DVD (\$30) and his *I Remember* memoir (\$20) are available at the Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. Please contact one of the Centres, if you would like to order your copy.

Endnotes

1. Peter Letkemann, “80th Birthday Tribute for Otto Klassen” *Mennonite Historian* 33/1 (March 2007): 1–2.

2. Otto Klassen, *I Remember: The Story of Otto Klassen*, trans. Jakob Klassen (Winnipeg: Klassen Publishing, 2013), 115–116.

West Prussian Records

(cont'd from p. 3)

children) are frequently listed as heirs.

A page from the *Grundbuch* of the village of Klein Mausdorferweide is shown in the adjacent photo. It indicates that Abraham Dyck of Klein Mausdorferweide exchanged his property with the property of Johann Klein (a very rare Mennonite name!) and wife Sara Entz, with Klein paying an additional 450 Reichsthaler. Important here is that Dyck's deceased wife, Anna Kroeker, was the last wife of the late Jacob Hoepfner. When this transaction took place, the surviving children of Jacob Hoepfner and Anna Kroeker were entitled to a share of the money. These children were Anton (1762–1806), who was represented by Franz Schroeder (of Waldorf), Anna, the wife of Heinrich Dyck, and Helena, the wife of Abraham Classen. One can see that Jacob Hoepfner's children Jacob (the deputy 1748–1826), Peter (b. 1852) and Catharina (b. 1757) are not mentioned. This is because they were not children of Anna Kroeker, but from an earlier wife of Jacob Hoepfner Sr.

Mennonites and Ukrainians

(cont'd from p. 6)

spirit during the dark days of Stalin's reign of terror. They told the story of their 93-year-old grandmother, Katharina Friesen. She grew up in a Mennonite home and married a Ukrainian, Georgif Kuzmenko. They grew up during the times of the Revolution, the anarchy, the typhus epidemic, the collectivization, the famine 1922–1923, dekulakization, and the Holdomor famine, 1932–1933. The couple left Ukraine after World War II, fleeing to Germany where the family name was changed to Friesen. From Germany they immigrated to Canada. Their family's story is a living example of the shared Ukrainian-Mennonite experience.

Miroslav Shkandrij's presentation situated all of the evening's reflections on suffering by describing the struggle for memory that is now taking place in post-Soviet Russia. He noted that monuments to victims of Stalin's "Great Terror" are being established in Ukraine and elsewhere. Since 1990, Soviet-era archives in Ukraine are being opened to the public and a clearer picture is emerging of how the Soviet system worked and who the key people were. Archival documents reveal elaborate codes designed to veil meaning and hide culpability.

The struggle for memory continues as

some Russian scholars are working to discredit the magnitude of hardships endured by the Ukrainian population. Shkandrij contended that because archives were closed for so long, the myth of Stalin's greatness manages to live on. Even the Holdomor famine is downplayed or deemed a non-event by some.

Clint Curle reminded attendees that it is the responsibility of us all to uphold human rights and remember failures that have occurred. The presentations served to highlight the importance of Winnipeg's new Museum for Human Rights, now scheduled to open September 2014.

Endnotes

1. For more analysis, see Colin Neufeldt's article in *Mennonite Quarter Review* 83/2 (April 2009): 221–291.

Turnhill

(cont'd from p. 2)

school building was vacant and for sale. The fledgling church bought the building at auction for \$425 in February 1913, after much fundraising and help from members of the Bethel Church in Main Centre. The new church was given the name "Bethania," which means "House of Poverty."

On June 12, 1913, Bethania MB Church had its first baptism service, which took place in the South Saskatchewan River and was led by Rev. Benjamin Janz (1849–1916). The number of church members continued to increase as new Christians joined the congregation. In 1918, another rapid increase of membership was experienced when a number of US settlers from Kansas and Oklahoma moved into the Turnhill district. The number of members increased once again in 1923, with the arrival of Russian Mennonites fleeing communist collectivization in Ukraine. Bethania MB church was now some 70 members strong. The growing congregation required a larger place of worship, and so in 1928 and 1929, the original church building was moved onto a new basement and an extension was made. This would remain the place of worship until the church closed in 1970.

From the start, Bethania MB Church had lay leadership. During its first several years, Johann W. Neufeld undertook this leadership. He was replaced in 1920 with Johann Ratzlaff, and then in 1928, with Johann Neufeld's son, Heinrich P. Neufeld. Other church leaders included: A.R.D. Klassen, Peter Martens, George Klassen, Eugene Martens, G.R. Klassen, P.J. Klassen, and Gottlieb Janz. While

these leaders were often involved in preaching the Sunday sermon and carrying out home visits, the church was also visited by ministers from neighboring church stations. On rarer occasions, ministers would visit from Manitoba or the USA.

The church had a special place in their ministry for missions. India, China, and Africa were some of the overseas mission locations the church supported. One of India's well-known missionaries, J.H. Lohrenz (1893–1971), visited several times, as well as many others who would visit friends and family while on furlough. Often, these visiting missionaries would warrant a special celebration, during which time the congregation would get to hear stories from the mission field. These special occasions are described in the correspondence published by the *Zionsbote* and *Mennonitische Rundschau* in the 1920s and early 1930s.

Life on the prairies was hard, and the church was well versed in dealing with death, illness, failed crops, and awful weather. The Turnhill district was made up of small farms, whose survival depended on the weather. As farms expanded, it became difficult for the youth to find work in the area. Many people had to move away to find jobs. As a result, church membership suffered.

Other factors continued to affect Bethania MB Church membership. With travel becoming increasingly easier, it was no longer difficult for those living in the Turnhill district to attend the larger churches in Herbert and Main Centre. Families were also deciding to sell their farms and move to larger centers. Small station churches no longer needed to exist every 8 to 10 miles.

In April 1969, under the leadership of Gottlieb Janz, Bethania MB Church decided to close its doors. Regular services were no longer held after July 6, 1969; however, the church did not officially close until July 1, 1970. Today, the church still stands as a reminder of those early pioneer days, when traveling a few miles was anything but easy and each district depended on their small church congregations for leadership, guidance, and community.

Endnotes

1. A third book, one containing the minutes of the *Jugend Verein*, was also part of the collection. The three books and the English translation of the two church books are now part of the Bethania MB Church congregational records (Volume 809) at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg.

Book Reviews

Voice in the Wilderness: Memoirs of Peter A. Elias (1843–1925), translated and edited by Adolf Ens and Henry Unger (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2013), 163 pp.

by Donald Stoesz, a prison chaplain in Bowden, Alberta.

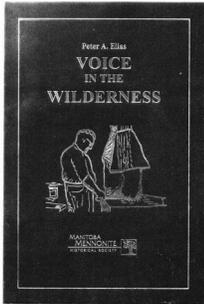
This book offers a fascinating glimpse into the life and faith of the Old Colony Church as viewed through the eyes of one of its members, Peter A. Elias.

Peter was 32 years old when he, his wife Katharina, and four children moved in 1875 to southern Manitoba, together with their parents and many other people from the Fuerstenland Colony in Russia. The immediate family moved a total of five times in 10 years (1875, 1875, 1876, 1878, 1885), before they settled more permanently in 1891 on a farm in Hochfeld. By then, they had 11 children and Peter owned a threshing machine along with his farm and blacksmith business.

There are many fascinating details in this history. Peter relates how they, as a young couple, kept a cow and horse in their first house in Russia, because there was no barn. He describes in detail how they raised silkworms in Russia to make thread, and how primitive the threshing methods were.

Other details include the fact that they had as many children as his parents (11), that 26 of 83 grandchildren predeceased him when he died in 1925 at the age of 82, and that two of their children died of tuberculosis in 1918. The suffering in illness and anguish over the question of salvation described in these pages are heart-rending.

Sandwiched between a biographical and autobiographical account at the beginning and a series of translated letters at the end of the book, is Peter's own account of church life. Peter writes during a time in which his Old Colony Church faced tension between communal village life and individual land ownership, between keeping separate from the world and accepting the authority of the state,



between allowing freedom of choice in matters of religion and keeping all members within “the fold” of the Reinlander church through such devices as discipline, shunning, the ban, and excommunication. Peter faced many of these issues on a deeply personal level.

Peter took his family out of the cooperative village system of Gruenfeld in 1885 and moved to his brother-in-law's farm near Blumenfeld. His son Johann along with his wife Anna, joined the Bergthaler church. The use of mortgages, lawyers, judges, land titles, banks, and interest became more of a necessity.

Reflecting theologically on these social and economic issues, Peter challenged his church to be more consistent in their rejection of worldly practices. He suggested that while a murderer should be “cleansed” from the church, he should not be reported to the authorities, because the church would then be condoning capital punishment. He told the church that they should not be charging and collecting interest in their orphans' benefit fund (*Waisenamt*). He accepted the fact that he could not mingle with those people who had joined the Bergthalers (some of his own family). He wondered why footwashing as commanded by Jesus was not practised in the church. He questioned the behaviour of one of the bishop's sons and wondered if the bishop was still qualified to be a bishop.

It is not surprising that he was visited no less than two times by Bishop Johann Wiebe (1885, 1902) and at least four times by Bishop Peter Wiebe along with three to five other ministers (1906, 1908, 1909, 1912). While they could not come to any final agreement, Peter Elias was always quick to defend the actions of his children and son-in-laws, even if he disagreed with them.

In the light of this sometimes deeply acrimonious debate, the title of the book is fitting. Peter was a “voice in the wilderness” because he would not rest until he had challenged the church leadership in areas that he felt they were straying away from the gospel. His deeply-held beliefs were shaped by his life in Russia and honed by the many new challenges in Canada.

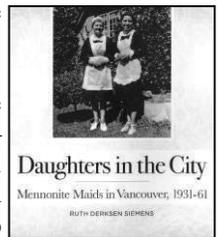
The book is an excellent read for the person who wants a deeper understanding of the church dynamics that were at work in the first half-century of the Manitoba Mennonite settlement. The arguments, both theologically and biblically, are as relevant today, as they were then. The

opportunities of land ownership and the new reality of religious freedom that Peter himself lauds come back to haunt him as he tries to remain faithful to his own belief in the church as a binding, corporate body. The irony in all of this is that he and his wife joined the Sommerfeld Mennonite church in 1923, when most of his Reinlander church emigrated, leaving for Mexico because of their religious beliefs.

Ruth Derksen Siemens, *Daughters in the City: Mennonite Maids in Vancouver, 1931–1961* (Vancouver: Fernwood, 2013), 93 pp.

by Victor Kliever, a minister in Steinbach.

When the large immigrant movements of Russian Mennonites came to Canada in 1923–1930, most arrived with very limited financial means to



repay their travel debt (*Reiseschuld*) and to get established. Farm income during the 1930s was low, and the marketable skills of the German-speaking Mennonites were limited. In this situation, significant numbers of young Mennonite women found employment in some of the larger cities—in particular Winnipeg, Calgary, Saskatoon, and Vancouver—and were able to contribute significantly toward the family finances. Initially, work as domestics was most readily available; with time and increased language skills, other occupations in education, health care, and secretarial services also became popular choices.

A major concern for the families and the church leaders, was the well-being of these “girls,” who were, as Frank Epp quotes, “tossed by circumstances into the whirlpool of the big city” (*Mennonites in Canada, 1920–1940*, 475). Out of this concern came the decision by two of the major Mennonite conferences in Canada to establish “girls' homes” (*Mädchenheime*), which were administered by older matrons or pastoral couples and provided a “home away from home,” centres for friendship, worship, employment services, counselling help, and occasionally boarding. The General Conference Mennonite Church established homes in Winnipeg (1926), Saskatoon (1929), Vancouver (1935), and Calgary (1945). Similarly, the Mennonite

Brethren Conference established homes in Winnipeg (1925), Saskatoon (1930), Vancouver (1931), and Calgary (1942).

A fairly limited amount of literature is available on the overall topic of the *Mädchenheime*, as well as the individual homes: for example, Frank Epp in *Mennonites in Canada 1920–1940* and T.D. Regehr in *Mennonites in Canada 1939–1970*, each devote a few pages to the topic. Anna Thiessen, the long-time matron of the Mary-Martha Home in Winnipeg, devotes a chapter to that home in *The City Mission in Winnipeg*. Esther Epp-Tiessen, in her biography of J.J. Thiessen, *A Leader for His Time*, includes a section on the *Mädchenheim* in Saskatoon, which was under the care of Thiessen and his wife Katharina. And there are various brief articles in the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO).

Ruth Derksen Siemens' monograph, *Daughters in the City: Mennonite Maids in Vancouver, 1931–1961*, is a welcome addition to this collection, focusing, as the title indicates, on the experience of the Mennonite "girls" in Vancouver. As noted in the Introduction, the purpose of the book is twofold: first, to preserve the historical experiences of the young Mennonite women who immigrated to Canada in the 1920s and then again from 1948–1950; and, second, to inform a broader audience of these experiences.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter, "Daughters in the City," sketches the historical background to the Canadian experience, noting not only the Mennonite experience of life in Russia but also the divisions that emerged among the Russian Mennonites—which were carried over into the new Canadian setting. The author also observes that in the Mennonite world view of the time—not unlike that of many other conservative religious groups—the city was perceived to be an evil and dangerous place.

Given this background but also the financial needs of the immigrant families, the young women came to foreign environment of Vancouver to find employment. Despite their limited knowledge of English and the Canadian culture, they were valued for their honesty and work ethic. And for them, helping their cash-strapped families to pay off the travel debt was a major motivation. As Derksen Siemens notes, "The travel debt united the women in a common ambition and goal" (19).

It is in this context that the churches decided that some form of support for the young women was essential and that not one, but two "homes" were established in Vancouver: The Bethel Home by the Mennonite Brethren (1931) and the Mary-Martha Home by the General Conference (1935). The homes, ironically located not far from each other, were sponsored and run along parallel but separate tracks, providing a safe haven for the women, including Bible studies, employment counseling, friendship, and leisure time activities. Both also contributed significantly to the growth of the emerging urban Mennonite/Mennonite Brethren churches. Both were closed within a year of each other, in 1960 and 1961, by then Mennonites had clearly come to accept urban life, and Mennonite churches were firmly established in Vancouver. The activities and changing roles of the two homes are described in separate chapters. The book presents a rich overview of the life and experiences of not only the young Mennonite women, but also of the larger world of which they were or were becoming a part, as they—and their families and their home communities—encountered the new realities in the Canadian context. The narrative is enriched by numerous photographs, which represent a valuable collection in themselves, and the biographies of several of the women, notably Tina Lehn, the matron of the Mary-Martha Home from 1946–1957. The final chapter concludes with the motif (and the photo) of a quilt which was crafted in 1937–1938 and with its individually unique squares came to symbolize how the young women "gathered their individual and communal experiences, stitched them together from disjointed scraps, and attached them onto a larger layer of durable material that has anchored the fabric of their lives" (81).

This is a delightful coffee table book and can be enjoyed by anyone interested in this chapter of Canadian Mennonite

history. It is also carefully crafted, with adequate references to the persons interviewed and to the secondary sources consulted. *Daughters in the City* will be a useful addition to the larger academic fields of ethnic immigration and immigrant women in Canada.

Summer 2014 Archival Internship

The Historical Commission of the U.S. and Canadian Mennonite Brethren Churches announces one "Summer 2014 Archival Internship," designed to give a college/seminary student practical archival experience at each of the four Mennonite Brethren archival institutions in North America. Spanning five weeks during May and June (exact dates to be determined), the intern will spend a week at each of the MB archives (Winnipeg, Hillsboro, Fresno, and Abbotsford). Each archival site will host the intern, providing orientation to the context and collection, and involve the intern in its ongoing projects. In addition to experiencing a functioning archive, the intern will gather stories, images, and video during the four weeks related to a particular theme in Mennonite Brethren church history, spending the fifth week producing a report that is compelling and image-rich—one that promotes the mission of church archives. Airline travel and accommodations will be provided by the Historical Commission. The internship comes with a stipend of \$2,000. To apply, send the following materials by **February 3, 2014**, to Jon Isaak (jisaak@mbconf.ca), Executive Secretary, Historical Commission, 1310 Taylor Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 3Z6: a statement indicating why/how the internship would be helpful to you, a statement outlining your research interests in Mennonite Brethren church history, a vitae, and one letter of recommendation. The internship award will be announced March 3, 2014, allowing scheduling to be made in consultation with the intern. The Selection Committee may choose not to award the internship, if none of the applications is deemed acceptable. See www.mbhhistory.org for more information.



**Mennonite Brethren
HISTORICAL
COMMISSION**



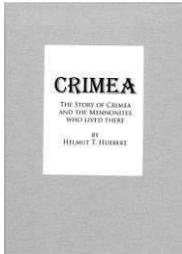
Mennonites and Ukrainians Symposium presenters (L-R): Colin Neufeldt, Peter Letkemann, Ellen Cobb-Friesen, Valerie Cobb-Friesen, Miroslav Shkandrij, and Clint Curle.

Book Notes

by Jon Isaak

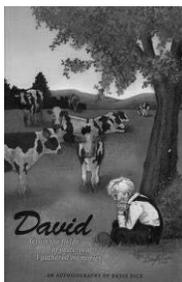
Helmut T. Huebert, *Crimea: the story of Crimea and the Mennonites who lived there* (Springfield, 2013), 149 pp.

For Mennonite historian Helmut Huebert, Crimea is not only a region where world history was made (e.g., Crimean War [1853–1856] and the development of modern nursing techniques as championed by Florence Nightingale), it represents a microcosm of Mennonite life. Huebert, known for his detailed lists and maps (see his other publications: *Mennonite Historical Atlas* [1990], *Events and People* [1999], *Mennonite Estates* [2005], *Stalin's Year of Terror* [2007]), continues with an equally detailed treatment of Crimea. There are chapters on: the history of Crimea, the Mennonite settlements (complete with lists and maps of the 55 villages and the 38 estates), the schools and churches in Crimea (with each one listed and briefly described), the well-known Mennonite leaders (short biographies and photographs of 22 community leaders), as well as the Crimean Mennonite experience during the revolution, civil war, communist takeover, and World War II.



David Dick, *David: Across the fields of yesteryear I gathered memories: the autobiography of David Dick* (2013), 220 pp.

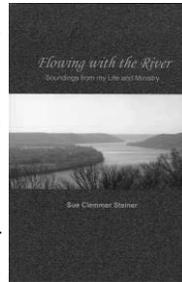
David Dick was raised in Coaldale, Alberta, and lived much of his life in Linden and Calgary. Active in the field of education for over 40 years, in both teaching and administration, David also served in local and conference ministries with the Mennonite Brethren Church for many years. With many pictures, David narrates each of the stages of his life—both high and low points—that he has shared with his wife, Elfrieda Pauls, and their children—Harold, Marion, Stanley, Valorie, and Vernon, along with their families. David concludes his autobiography with a reference to the watch and compass he



received from his mother at her passing, noting their significance in a prayer for his children and grandchildren.

Sue Clemmer Steiner, *Flowing with the River: soundings from my life and ministry* (2013), 174 pp.

Minister Sue Clemmer Steiner has for years claimed *flowing with the river* as a basic metaphor for Christian life and vocation. This is her memoir as a female pastor, one of the first in the Mennonite Church of Eastern Canada. Beginning with her childhood, growing up in the Franconia Mennonite Conference in Pennsylvania in the 1950s, Sue identifies key moments where she hears the “surf” of God’s leading. The challenging years at Goshen Collge in the 1960s on the student newspaper awakened in her a love for words, advocacy, and justice. Following a Goshen College draft resister named Sam Steiner to Kitchener, Ontario, further galvanized her sense of calling. They married and she continued to expand her ministry experience, finding her ministry “voice” through worship leading, seminary studies, and several long-term pastoral appointments in Ontario. Rich in imagery, poetic verse, photographs, and insights from 25 years of ministry, Sue invites readers deeper into their own river journey with God, as she shares hers.

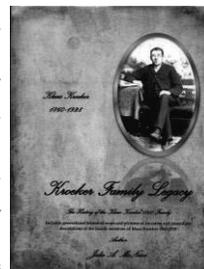


Recent Family History Books

by Conrad Stoesz

Julie McNeice, *Kroeker Family Legacy: The history of the Klaas Kroeker (1860–1928) Family* (Morden, MB: Julie McNiece, 2013), 337 pp.

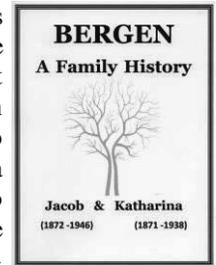
After a historical context of Mennonite and Kroeker family history, this book follows the life story of Klaas Kroeker and Helena Dueck (1864–1943). Both came to the Mennonite West Reserve in southern Manitoba as teenagers in the 1870s and were married in 1883. Together they had



ten children, seven of which survived into adulthood. The book follows each of these descendants of Klaas and Helene through a collection of charts and rich photos. McNeice weaves the story of the Kroeker family focusing on narrative and family stories as told by McNeice and other family members. Contact Julie for copies at Julie@leadingchanges.ca

Martha Martens, *Bergen: A Family History, Jacob (1872–1946) & Katharina (1871–1938)* (Winkler, MB: Martha’s Musings Production, 2013), 196 pp.

This book begins by tracing the Bergen family in West Prussia and then narrows to the Jacob Bergen and Katarina Klassen family, who immigrated to the Mennonite West Reserve of Manitoba with their parents in the 1870s. Jacob and Katharina had twelve children and by 1898 had a homestead in the Hague Osler Reserve of Saskatchewan. Some descendants later moved to Mexico. The book is an even mix of narrative and vital statistics. Contact Martha Martens emm@mts.net for copies.



Valerie Beckingham, *Our Friesen Family* (The Pas, MB: Valerie Beckingham, 2013), 135 pp.

The book opens with a detailed section that attempts to make sense of the suicide of businessman Peter J. Friesen (1868–1931) and its implications for the family milling business, for the shareholders, and for the family living near Gretna, Manitoba. The book proceeds to offer a detailed narrative about Peter’s grandparents: Peter Friesen (b. 1822) and Sara Schwartz (b. 1817); and Peter’s parents: Jacob Friesen (1845–1922) and Henrietta Unger (1872–1954); and Jacob’s three children: Peter, Jacob, and Maria. The last portion focuses on the descendants of Maria Friesen (1881–1975) and Jacob L. Friesen (1876–1951). Contact the author at P.O. Box 1613, The Pas, MB R9A 1L4.

