

Mennonite Historian

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



Jean-François Millet (1859), *The Angelus* (Wikimedia Commons). Farming couple offers a prayer of devotion at the end of the day, grateful for the Lord’s provision, including the potato harvest. See story on page 2.

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Bread for the poor: Potatoes and the church

by Hielke De Jong

The humble potato—now the world's third largest food crop—has had a major impact on society.¹ After its domestication about 8,000 years ago in the vicinity of Lake Titicaca, its cultivation gradually spread throughout the Andean highlands of South America. The potato also had several non-food uses—for dyeing fabric, increasing fertility, and funeral ceremonies.² At least 2,000 years ago, Andean societies developed *chuño*, a preserved potato product that is probably the oldest example of freeze-drying. Not surprisingly, over time, the potato became intimately interwoven with the culture and religion of the Andean societies.

After its introduction in Europe, several different religious groups, including Anabaptists, played a major role in the dissemination and cultivation of the potato. Especially those who were persecuted because of their faith learned to rely on the potato in their time of need. This in turn led to the potato often being considered “the Bread for the Poor.”

Monasteries, botanical gardens, and herbals

The first record of the potato being grown on the European continent is from 1573,

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Editors: Jon Isaak (CMBS)
Conrad Stoesz (MHA)

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

1310 Taylor Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R3M 3Z6
204.669.6575
jon.isaak@mbchurches.ca
or
500 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, MB R3P 2N2
204.487.3300 ext. 345
cstoesz@cmu.ca

www.mennonitehistorian.ca

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when potatoes were noted on a list of purchases made by a Carmelite hospital in Sevilla, Spain.³ Teresa of Avila was the first known consumer of potatoes in Europe. This occurred in 1578 when, after Teresa had instituted several reforms in the Carmelite order, she was exiled by her opponents to the Carmelite monastery in Toledo, Spain. While there, she received a food package from the monastery in Sevilla that included potatoes and for which she twice wrote a thank-you note.⁴ In 1584, the same Carmelite order founded a monastery in Genova, Italy; they probably brought potatoes with them on that occasion or soon afterward.⁵

For a couple of centuries, the potato was confined to monasteries and botanical gardens in Europe and to descriptions in several herbals, books containing the names of plants and explanations of their medicinal value. There were several reasons for the reluctance to grow or eat potatoes. (1) It was not mentioned in the Bible; and, therefore, not a food designed by God for human consumption. (2) It had a negative “signature.” The Doctrine of Signatures held that God marked objects with a sign, or signature as to their purpose. Because of their rough shape, potatoes were thought to cause leprosy, etc.⁶

The central figure in the botanical world of the day was Carolus Clusius, a.k.a. Charles de l'Escluse (1526–1609). At the invitation of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II, he established an imperial botanical garden in Vienna.⁷ In 1588, while working in Vienna, in a very roundabout way, Clusius received two tubers from a friend who in turn had received them from the Papal Legate in Belgium, who called them by the Italian name of *Taratouffli*. The Legate had brought these tubers from Italy. Clusius wondered why he had not heard of the potato before—by this time, it was common in certain parts of Italy to boil the tubers with mutton and eat them like turnips and carrots; and even to feed them to swine.⁸

Waldensians the first European potato farmers?

It has been suggested that it was the Waldensian farmers in the mountainous area of the Piedmont in Northern Italy who were the source of the tubers that eventually reached Clusius in Vienna in 1588. The Waldensians had their origin in France in the 12th century as followers of

Peter Waldo. Like Mennonites, they were severely persecuted for their faith and often withdrew to relatively inaccessible areas where they became very skilled farmers.⁹

When they were persecuted again,¹⁰ Waldensian leader Henry Arnaud (1641–1721) led his fellow believers from the Waldensian valleys in Italy to Southern Germany. Arnaud grew potatoes in his parish garden of Schönenberg and distributed them throughout the Waldensian colony there. A memorial plaque at Arnaud's former home (now a museum) commemorates the introduction of potatoes in Württemberg by the Waldensians. The inscription reads: *Arnaud pflanzte hier einst in Schwaben die ersten Kartoffeln. Welchen Segen schuf so friedlich der treffliche Held!* [Here Arnaud planted the first potatoes in Swabia. What a blessing the peaceful hero made!].¹¹

Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and its aftermath

In France, progressive Protestant farmers were protected by the Edict of Nantes issued in 1598. However, under the slogan “one king, one law, one faith,” the Edict was revoked in 1685. The subsequent persecution of religious minorities resulted in mass emigration of some of the best French farmers, who left with their agricultural know-how, including potato cultivation. Regions where Protestant farmers had made a major impact on agriculture, such as the Dauphiné (across the French-Italian border from the Piedmont), were especially hard hit.¹² The more tolerant countries to which they moved (primarily northern Europe) benefited at the expense of France.

Schwarzenau Brethren and Mennonite refugees in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, a group of “immersionists” (Schwarzenau Brethren, under the leadership of Alexander Mack) who arrived in 1720 and departed in 1728 for Germantown, Pennsylvania, may have introduced the potato in the province of Friesland. In the neighbouring province of Groningen, Swiss Anabaptists from the Palatinate probably introduced the first potatoes there in the early part of the 18th century. The famous Dutch potato breeder, Geert Veenhuizen (1857–1930), was a descendant of these Swiss Anabaptist refugees.¹³

(cont'd on p. 4)

Genealogy and Family History

Mennonites and middle names

by Glenn H. Penner, Winnipeg

Those who have used the GRANDMA genealogical database may have been confused by the inconsistent use of middle names for those born in the 19th century or earlier. Some may wonder where these middle names come from and if these people really used middle names.¹

Contemporary Mennonites in North America tend to give their children middle names. What middle name is given depends on many factors. One thing that can be said with a fair degree of certainty is that *most* middle names given in North America no longer come from any specific naming pattern or tradition.

Many of us baby boomers need only go back a generation or two along the Mennonite side(s) of our families to discover that traditionally Mennonites did not, as a rule, give their children middle names. For example, neither of my parents, nor any of my grandparents were given middle names. This should not be confused with the use of an initial or occasionally a middle name that was not actually given to the person, but taken on as an adult. For example, in rural Manitoba among the descendants of those who came to Canada in the 1870s, it was common for an adult man to use the initial from his father's first name or his mother's maiden name. This practice helped sort out all of the Henry Penners or the Abe Friesens in a particular area.² Of course, we Mennonites were always able to sort out men or women of the same name by the use of nicknames. For example, in Plum Coulee, for a time, we had two David Wiebes: "Schmaunt" Wiebe and "Lehra" Wiebe.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, thousands of Mennonites fleeing communist Russia appeared on the Canadian Prairies. These people had been in the Russian system for about 50 years longer than those who came in the 1870s. As a result, many used the traditional Russian patronymic system whereby both men and women used their fathers' first name as a middle name. The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization records, begun in 1923, are an example of Mennonite records that use patronymics.³

However, it should be pointed out that this was not a Mennonite tradition. Mennonite parents did not give their children middle names. Mennonite church records prior to the communist period did not normally record middle names. However, many official Russian documents and all census (revision) lists from 1835 on did use patronymics in recording the names of Mennonite men. So, once again, Russian Mennonites were not given middle names by their parents, but used the Russian tradition of patronymics more frequently with every generation.

The Russian tradition of using the father's first name as a middle name has been a tremendous boon for Mennonite genealogists. For example, the 1835 Russian revision list (census) for the Molotschna colony includes the father's name for every male household head as a patronymic.⁴ These middle names provide the names of the fathers, who stayed behind (or had already died) in Prussia. Similarly, patronymics are used in the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization records of those who emigrated from Russia to Canada in the 1920s to 1940s. These middle names provide the names of the fathers, who stayed behind (or had already died) in Russia. From 1850 on, most Russian census lists also included the patronymic for the mother of the household.

In Prussia, prior to the last big migrations to Russia of 1818–1820, middle names were rarely used. From about the 1820s on, those who remained in Prussia became more Germanized with every generation. This can be seen by the increasing use of first names that were German, but not traditionally Mennonite (such as Carl, Gustav, Amalia, and Wilhelmina) and the use of middle names. Many of our so-called "Mennonite" family names were also well known among the local German population and this difference between naming traditions of the Mennonites and their German neighbours turns out to be very genealogically useful in identifying Mennonites. Mennonites are found in many West Prussian Lutheran and Catholic Church registers. There are two reasons for this. First, most Mennonite congregations were not allowed to have their own cemeteries and were required

to bury their dead in nearby Lutheran or Catholic cemeteries. These Mennonites are included in the death/burial registers of these Lutheran or Catholic Churches. Second, from 1800 on, all Mennonite births, marriages, and deaths had to be recorded by the state (Lutheran) church. As a result, one finds many post-1800 registers with Mennonites interspersed among the Germans.

There seems to be much confusion among Mennonite genealogists regarding middle names and their ancestors. The solution is simple—do not impose a middle name on your ancestor unless you have absolute proof. Just because a man was recorded as Johann Jacob in a Russian census or in a Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization record does not mean that his name was Johann Jacob. The "Jacob" was included as a patronymic only because of the naming tradition used by Russian officials recording his name. The GRANDMA database¹ has many thousands of middle names incorrectly given to (mostly) men due to this misconception!

Glenn Penner relocated to Winnipeg several months ago, following retirement as a chemistry professor at the University of Guelph in Ontario. He can now devote even more time to his avocation, Mennonite genealogy. He has arranged to work out of the Mennonite Heritage Archives on the Canadian Mennonite University campus in Winnipeg. If you have a genealogical query, he's open to corresponding with you. He can be reached at his University of Guelph email address, which he still maintains, <gpenner@uoguelph.ca>.

Endnotes

1. The GRANDMA database. See: <https://www.gendmaonline.org/gmolstore/pc/Overview-d1.htm>
2. <http://dailybonnet.com/abe-friesens-required-law-use-middle-initial/>
3. Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization records. Originals are at the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg. Images of the immigration registration cards for 1923 to 1930 can be found at: http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives/holdings/organizations/CMBoc_Forms/
4. 1835 Molotschna Colony census. Odessa Regional State Archives (Ukraine), Fond 89, Inventory 1, files 357. English translation available at the Mennonite Heritage Archives, Winnipeg.

Public celebration marking the
opening of the reconfigured
Mennonite Heritage Archives
October 5, 2017 @ 7 pm
600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg

Potatoes and the church

(cont'd from p. 2)

Quaker and Presbyterian immigrants in North America

The potato was probably introduced into North America on several occasions. In 1685, when William Penn described Pennsylvania to potential immigrants, he included *Irish Potatoes* in a long list of crops that did well there. In 1719, a group of Scottish Presbyterian immigrants from Northern Ireland settled in Londonderry, New Hampshire; among the goods they brought with them was the potato. Although this group of settlers is often credited with the introduction of the potato for general use in North America, it appears from the above that they may not have been the first.¹⁴

Mormon pioneers

After its founding in 1830 in the state of New York, the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (L.D.S.) was persecuted in the USA. Under the leadership of Brigham Young, they moved west to the Salt Lake Valley where they immediately established farms. According to the L.D.S. Church Historical Department, the manuscript history of Brigham Young states that on July 24, 1847, “at about noon, the five-acre potato patch was plowed when the brethren commenced planting their seed potatoes.” A search for more land brought them to Idaho. By 1875, the Mormons were shipping potatoes to California—a San Francisco newspaper called them “Brigham’s Potatoes.”¹⁵

Major contributions by clergy

Rev. Miles Joseph Berkeley (1803–1889) was an ordained priest and deacon in the Church of England. During the disastrous Irish Potato Famine in the 1840s, Berkeley very actively participated in a debate about the cause of the late blight disease of potatoes. This eventually led to the birth of modern plant pathology. At the time, it was thought that diseases were caused by spontaneous generation rather than by microorganisms. Regarding the late blight of potatoes, there were several different views about its cause. Some opined that the disease was caused by the devil, while others suggested that it was a punishment by God. Even though Rev. Berkeley was an amateur biologist, he made a monumental contribution to the understanding of plant disease. In his 1846 classic publication, he

described how he had observed the fungus microscopically on potato leaves; it was revolutionary thinking to suggest that this might be the cause of the disease.¹⁶

Rev. Chauncey E. Goodrich (1801–1864) was an Episcopalian minister in upstate New York. In the decades following the Irish Potato Famine, there was a flurry of activity in finding new cultivars or varieties in Europe and North America that would be resistant to late blight. As new cultivars came to the market, there were unrealistic expectations that they would deliver great results to the farming community. This in turn drove up the price of seed potatoes of new cultivars to the point that, in the USA by 1868–1869, one new cultivar fetched fifty dollars per tuber. Henry Ward Beecher, who described this potato mania, mused that: “Prospectors, with pick and pan, may do very well in the Rocky Mountains, but the true way to dig for gold in New York State is to let your potatoes do it for you.”¹⁷ However, Rev. Goodrich, whom Beecher called “the Pioneer and Patriarch of the New Kingdom of Potatoes,” did not succumb to this temptation and died a pauper. He was completely devoted to finding a cure for the late blight disease and spared no effort or expense toward this end. One of his seedlings, “Garnet Chili,” features prominently in the pedigrees of most North American and many European cultivars.

Rev. Henry H. Spalding (1803–1874) was a Presbyterian missionary working with the Nez Perce Indigenous peoples of the Pacific North West. In 1837, in order to diversify the food supply of the Nez Perce, Rev. Spalding was the first to grow potatoes in Idaho, now the largest potato-growing state in the USA.¹⁸

Mennonite potato pioneers

Jacques Klopfenstein (1763–1841). Toward

the end of the 18th century, religious tolerance in France slowly improved and several Mennonite farmers settled in the Alsace region. Around the same time, pharmacist Antoine-Augustin Parmentier was conducting a major national campaign to promote potatoes in France.¹⁹ One of the settlers in Alsace was Jacques Klopfenstein, a Mennonite of Belfort who operated a large farm on which he planted many vegetables for the local market. In 1810, he received a gold medal from the Société d’Agriculture de Paris, which was presented to him in an Anabaptist church service.²⁰ Klopfenstein also published an agricultural almanac from 1812–1845, entitled *L’Anabaptiste ou le Cultivateur par Expérience*, in which he advised on livestock and many crops, including the planting, storage, hilling, sprouting, nutritional value, and several other aspects of the potato (see image below).²¹

Johann Cornies (1789–1848). Even though Catherine the Great of Russia ordered her subjects to begin cultivating potatoes, many ignored this order. They were supported in this dissension by the Orthodox Church, which argued



Cover of the first edition (1812), second printing of the almanac *L’Anabaptiste ou le Cultivateur par Expérience*. Note: the sun is replaced by the emblem of the Napoleonic empire. Source: *Mennonite Life* 9/4 (October 1954): 154. Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas.

that potatoes were suspect because they were not mentioned in the Bible.²² It was Johann Cornies, the great pioneer in the Molotschna Mennonite colony, who introduced potatoes into that area. Cornies himself often supervised the potato cultivation. Many Russian and Ukrainian farmers were sent by the government to the Mennonite settlements to learn how to grow potatoes.²³

Kroeker Farms, Winkler, Manitoba. This family-owned business has its roots in the community dating back well over a century, beginning with Abram A. Kroeker (1892–1981), the son of Mennonite immigrants who came to Manitoba from Ukraine in 1876.²⁴ Today, it is one of Canada’s leading potato producers and among one of North America’s largest grower of organic potatoes. It is widely known and respected for its progressive approach to tillage, land stewardship, innovation, and quality. Its mission statement is: “To meet people’s needs, through innovative agriculture, in a way that honours God.”²⁵

Edward G. Snyder (1905–1991). “E.G.” was a devoted Mennonite churchman and a pioneer in the potato chip industry of Ontario. From very humble beginnings, he experimented with making potato chips in a large iron kettle on the kitchen stove in his home in what is now Cambridge. Initially, Edward’s potatoes were peeled by hand and salted from hand-shaken salters. The public demand for his chips led him to build a factory that eventually became part of the multinational Frito-Lay company.²⁶

Ode to faithful potato farmers everywhere After all is said and done, it is the faithful potato farmers everywhere who—through patient perseverance, keen observation, and trust in God—have been the major contributors to the success of the potato. In periods of dire need, the potato has time and again served as bread for the poor. Jean-François Millet (1814–1875) has beautifully captured the role of the faithful potato farmers in his painting, *The Angelus*. It depicts a farm couple bowing in a field over a basket of potatoes to say the Angelus Prayer (an old Roman Catholic traditional prayer) that, together with the ringing of the bell from the church on the horizon, marked the end of a day’s work (see cover image).

Hielke De Jong is a retired potato research scientist from the Agriculture

and Agri-Food Canada Potato Research Centre in Fredericton, New Brunswick. He and his wife now reside in “Pleasant Manor,” a Mennonite Retirement Centre in Virgil, Ontario. He acknowledges with appreciation the review and comments provided by Alf Redekopp on an early draft of this article.

Endnotes

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4. Willem H. Oliemans, *Het Brood van de Armen: De Geschiedenis van de Aardappel Temidden van Kettlers, Kloosterlingen en Kerkvorsten* (The Hague, Netherlands: SDU Uitgeverij, 1988): 17–25.
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6. Hielke De Jong, Joseph B. Siczka, and Walter De Jong, *The Complete Book of Potatoes. What Every Grower and Gardener Needs to Know* (Portland, OR: Timber Press, 2011): 211–213.
7. Ernest Roze, *Charles de l’Escluse d’Arras. Le Propagateur de la Pomme de Terre au XVIe Siècle* (Paris: J. Rothschild, 1899. Reprinted by Landré et Meesters and Kew Books, 1976). Because of his Protestant leanings, Clusius eventually fell out of favour with Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II who dismissed him. He subsequently moved to Leiden where he established a botanical garden and laid the foundation for the tulip industry in the Netherlands.
8. De Jong, 419.
9. Oliemans, 35–48.
10. During the infamous “Piedmont Easter” in Spring 1655, an estimated 1,700 Waldensians were massacred for their faith by the Duke of Savoy. See Oliemans, 119–121, 165–169; and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waldensians>.
11. <http://ieg-ego.eu/de/mediainfo/gedenkstein-fuer-die-einfuehrung-der-kartoffel-in-wuerttemberg>.
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24. Bert Friesen, “Kroeker, Abram Arthur (1892–1981),” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 2004, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Kroeker,_Abram_Arthur_\(1892-1981\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Kroeker,_Abram_Arthur_(1892-1981)).

25. <http://kroekerfarms.com/>.

26. Del Gingrich, “Snyder, Edward Groff (1905–1991),” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 2012, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Snyder,_Edward_Groff_\(1905-1991\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Snyder,_Edward_Groff_(1905-1991)).

Reflections on Canada 150: On track? or derailed?

by Randy Klassen, Saskatoon

The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) saved my people’s life. Maybe that sounds a bit dramatic. And actually, it’s a bit strange to say it that way—I don’t really ever talk about “my people” quite like that. But for this particular story, I’m learning it’s important that I do. Indeed, for many of us, this story is as familiar and formative as the biblical story of the Exodus itself.

The particular story is this: a century ago, as World War I was grinding on and the Russian revolution flared up, “my people” (those Mennonites of Dutch descent who spoke German and had lived as colonists in Russian-conquered Tatar, Bashkir, Nogai, and Ukrainian territories) experienced incredible hardship. Mennonites in North America heard about the hardships, and responded generously with relief supplies.

But many of the Mennonites from Russia wanted more than aid; they wanted to emigrate. They investigated US, Canada, and Mexico as possible destinations; only Canada chose to open its doors. But as a plundered and war-ravaged people, the costs of emigration were prohibitive. In 1922, a group of leaders formed the “Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization” and signed a deal with the CPR to transport 3,000 refugees on credit.

The émigrés began arriving in 1923, and by 1930 the CPR had brought more than 21 thousand refugees to Canada, at a loaned cost of over 1.7 million dollars. The stories of those left behind (like my father-in-law, who escaped the Soviet regime during World War II, or others

(cont’d on p. 7)



**Mennonite
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600 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4

European tour of historic Mennonite sites, 2017

by Conrad Stoesz

This summer I was privileged to take a trip to Germany, Switzerland, and France to make connections with people, institutions, and places significant to Anabaptist and Mennonite history. I visited the *Museum für Russlanddeutsche Kulturgeschichte* in Detmold, Germany, and was given a behind-the-scenes tour by the staff. The museum's mandate is to collect, preserve, and tell the story of the Germans who have come from Russia since the 1970s. While the Mennonites made up only a small minority of the Germans in Russia (10–15%), their story is featured prominently in the museum.

Since 2017 is the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's promotion of his 95

theses, the UNESCO site, Castle Wartburg had a special display about the story of Martin Luther. After Luther was excommunicated in 1521, he found protection in the isolated castle and lived under an assumed name. In eleven weeks, he translated the New Testament into German. It was fascinating to see some of the original documents and correspondence he wrote.

I then connected with TourMagination, where veteran historian and pastor John Ruth led a two-week bus tour for forty people from North America. We began in Zürich, the origin of the Swiss Radical Reformation. We visited the place where Conrad Grebel baptized George Blaurock in 1525 and where Felix Manz was drowned in the Limmat River in 1527. A special day for me was visiting the



Tour leader John Ruth (front) with Gary Waltner at Weierhof, Germany. Photo by Conrad Stoesz.

Zürich city archives. In the afternoon, we visited the cave where Anabaptists met in secluded safety for worship, community, and support. Four people from the nearby Reformed church met us at the cave and invited us for refreshments after our worship service. They explained that hosting us was important because it was a way of embodying reconciliation for how our spiritual ancestors were treated.

We toured some of the villages where Anabaptists lived. Many moved to areas in France and southern Germany after the Thirty Years war ended in 1648. They were invited to come help rebuild the war-torn areas; and in exchange, their beliefs were tolerated. We visited the building where the Amish and Mennonite split occurred in 1694, a cellar where 53 Anabaptists were detained, and a memorial stone near Schletenheim, placed by the Reformed church as a reconciliation initiative.

After the bus tour, I visited the *Mennonitische Forschungsstelle*, Weierhof. The *Forschungsstelle*, or research centre, has been managed by retired teacher Gary Waltner since 1975. Astrid von Schlachta has been hired on a part-time, three-year term to oversee volunteers and help organize the significant collection of materials. We saw some of the oldest Prussian Mennonite church registers and plates used to create the *Martyrs Mirror*. We visited the nearby, and growing, Mennonite Brethren congregation in Frankental, Germany.

I consider the trip a big success. New relationships were formed and old ones strengthened. I also realize that there is still more to see and people to visit—I may be back!

2017 MENNONITE STUDIES CONFERENCE
MENNONITE/S WRITING VIII:

PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF PLACE AND DISPLACEMENT

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mennonitestudies.uwinnipeg.ca/events

Historical Commission serves with trimmed budget

by Jon Isaak

The Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission met June 2–3, 2017, for its annual general meeting (AGM) in Winnipeg at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. The Commission heard reports from its four archives (Winnipeg, Abbotsford, Hillsboro, and Fresno), awarded several grants and scholarships, and planned for ways to continue its services to MB congregations, while trimming its budget in view of a projected reduction in subsidies from its owners.

Jordan Duerrstein reported on his five-week archival internship. He helped with the normal archival tasks at each of the four MB archives and explored aspects of community development, especially the entrepreneurial initiatives that have and continue to be part of MB church planting. Jordan returns to seminary this fall (Wycliffe College, Toronto). The Commission was pleased with the outcomes of the internship and agreed to offer the internship again next summer.

Buduma Ramesh, an MA student from India, was awarded a Katie Funk Wiebe research grant of \$550 for his project on the role of women—both women missionaries and the Indian “Bible Women” they trained—in the empowerment of Dalit women in the Mahabubnagar district of Telangana, India. Buduma’s thesis project at Union Biblical Seminary, Pune, India, honors the life and ministry of Katie Funk

Wiebe who passed away in 2016.

J.B. Toews \$1,000 scholarships were also awarded to Micheal Ryder of Columbia Bible College and Daniela Stahl of Canadian Mennonite University.

At the AGM, the Commission agreed to continue funding the six initiatives that it has developed in the recent years (archival internship, Katie Funk Wiebe research grant, MB studies project grant, J.B. Toews college scholarships, GAMEO stipends, and archival development grants), but scale back the number of awards in each category. For details about all six initiatives—and the news releases announcing this year’s recipients—see the Commission’s website (www.mbhhistory.org). The submission dates for the new grant year are already posted to the website.

The Commission works with a network of four Mennonite Brethren archival centers: Center for MB Studies (Hillsboro, Kansas), Mennonite Library & Archives (Fresno, California), Mennonite Historical Society of B.C. (Abbotsford, B.C.), and Centre for MB Studies (Winnipeg, Manitoba).

Since its formation in 1969, the Commission has helped coordinate the collection, preservation, and interpretation of Mennonite Brethren archival records: congregational meeting minutes, conference proceedings, personal papers, periodicals, and photographs.

More information about the work of the Commission, a funded ministry of both the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches and of the Canadian Conference



of Mennonite Brethren Churches, is available on the Commission’s website, www.mbhhistory.org.

Adapted from the Historical Commission news release, dated June 12, 2017.

Canada 150: On track? or derailed?

(cont'd from p. 5)

who left for Germany in the 1970s, or who like my father’s half-sister outlived the USSR and could be visited by Westerners in the 1990s) reaffirmed the reasons to be thankful for the CPR’s way of escape.

In the minds of many, the CPR was a divine tool along the lines of biblical Cyrus, God’s “anointed” who brought release to Israel in exile.

The CPR destroyed my neighbours’ lives. Again, this is perhaps overly dramatic—but in the bigger picture, I don’t think so. Railway was the Next Big Thing in the mid-1800s. And as the railways came westward first across the American Midwest, then in copycat style a generation later north of the 49th, they led to the catastrophic demise of the American bison, the mainstay of the prairie First Nations economies. This happened indirectly, by slicing up the seasonal paths of the grazing herds; but also more directly, by importing hunters by the thousands, and transporting out bison skins by the hundreds of thousands (one firm in St. Louis traded a quarter million hides in 1871).

We know the economic pain of crude oil dropping from \$100 to \$40 a barrel; can we imagine the devastation and cultural upheaval of the total collapse of the bison economy? Herds numbering in the tens of millions at the time of colonial contact were reduced to a few isolated remnants totalling about a thousand animals by 1889. The resulting mass starvation on the prairies became a very useful tool in the hands of the colonial governments, to encourage bands to sign the treaties—treaties that laid the groundwork for the colonizing that brought my people to Canada.



MB Historical Commission gathered in Winnipeg (June 2-3, 2017) for its annual general meeting (l to r): Dora Dueck, Don Isaac (chair), Peggy Goertzen, J Janzen (vice chair), Valerie Rempel (recording secretary), Hannah Keeney, Jon Isaak (executive secretary), Patricia Janzen Loewen, and Julia Reimer. Missing members: Richard Thiessen and Kevin Enns-Rempel. Photo credit: Gaylord Goertzen.

The CPR saved my family's life. My own family is bound up very much in the CPR immigration story. As the poor refugees arrived in Canada full of hope (including my mother's Thiessen family in 1925, and my father's in late 1928), the Great Depression struck. The \$1.7 million debt looked like an impossible burden. And my grandfather was the chief debt collector for the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, as an employee for the CPR. C.F. Klassen criss-crossed the country (by train, of course), visiting every little Mennonite church, farm, and house, collecting dollar by dollar, sometimes only penny by penny, the prohibitive debt.

The principal was paid off in 1946; only \$180,000 had been paid in interest, and the CPR forgave another \$1.5 million in interest. How could this not be seen as God's grace? And this work paved the way for another work of grace, as my grandfather returned to Europe after the war, and directed the resettlement of over seven thousand more Mennonite refugees from the USSR. His CPR work gave him knowledge of hundreds of Mennonite homes and communities across Canada, so that when he met fleeing families in Europe, he could help to connect them to relatives across the Atlantic.

The CPR derailed my neighbours' families. The story of the building of Canada "from sea to sea" is the story of the railway, and the CPR in particular, as the reward promised to British Columbia for joining Confederation. It's the story of "opening up" the West to European settlers, to occupy land advertised as "empty."

It's very specifically the story of the Riel Rebellion, with its almost 3,000 Canadian troops shipped out from Ontario and east, via the just-finished CPR lines, to suppress the Métis uprising against Ottawa's unjust rule. The fear that this event fomented in eastern Canada of "savage Indians" was then used to tighten the already oppressive regime of the Indian Act. For example, the unofficial (never passed into law) policy

of the pass system was still enforced, restricting the movements of Indigenous peoples off reserve.

And then, in 1890, Mennonite settlers arrived by rail in Laird, Saskatchewan. Federal agents in the years following sold those settlers land that had been set aside for the Young Chippewyan First Nation (Reserve 107). These Cree had signed Treaty 6 in 1876, but had fled the region in the aftermath of government crackdowns because of the 1885 Métis uprising (as well as ongoing famine because of the disappearance of the bison).

The land was theirs, but vacant, and now it was illegally re-appropriated and sold to settlers from "my people." The Young Chippewyan band, disbanded for a century and spread across western Canada, continues to work today to convince the government that they are the legitimate heirs of that broken treaty promise.

These intertwining stories are just a tiny, personal slice of 150 years of Canadian colonial complexity. It's not a rant or an attack on the railway *per se*, although the CPR was certainly a tool and a promoter of the larger project of colonialism (and it's commonly acknowledged that the railway enterprise of Canada's nation-building era was an "orgy of corruption": political kickbacks, subsidies, and the like). But mostly, this is a lament for the inextricable link between my story and my neighbours' stories, to which I've been blind for most of my fifty-plus years.

It's a painful reminder that as much as the CPR is part of my family's story, I am also part of the CPR's deeply checkered



C.F. Klassen (left) on first deputation for Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, October 1929, visiting Katharina & Klaas Enns and B.B. Janz (right) in Coaldale, Alberta. Names of children are unknown. Photo credit: Randy Klassen.

story. I might paraphrase the apostle: "The very railway that promised life [to me] proved to be death [to my neighbour]... Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? ...Wretched colonial that I am! Who will deliver me from this body politic of death?"

Who indeed! There is a Person whose name is *Truth*. And his mission in life (and death) is *Reconciliation*, a journey which he calls us all to join him on. For me, that has meant a willingness to have my eyes opened to the existence of my Indigenous neighbours. Very specifically, the lives of Cree neighbours like Junior, Lucille, *Kohkom* Betsy, Jamin, Shelley, Hal, Margaret, *Moshom* Charlie (may he rest in peace), and other friends. People whose lives and lands have been subject to the derailing actions of a century and more of Canadian injustice, yet who remain people of generosity, goodwill, wisdom, and good humour. Their friendship invites and inspires me to get to know their story better—and to let it shape my own.

I look forward to a time in Canada when their people and mine, indigenous and settlers, can all live side by side with openness, trust, and friendship. Side by side, strong and true, like parallel ribbons of steel, equal in size, stretching across this vast land—no, stronger yet, strong like the solid earth beneath the rails, the ground on which all else is built.

Randy Klassen lives in Saskatoon, in Treaty Six territory. He works for MCC Canada as national restorative justice coordinator. An earlier version of this article appeared online as a blog post at <www.newleafnetwork.ca>.



CPR train on bridge crossing the Canadian prairies. Photo by C.F. Klassen, October 1929.

Halbstadt tunnels

by Alvin Suderman, Winnipeg

The “footprint” left by Russian Mennonites in Ukraine is still discernible 100 years after the upheaval of revolution and war that marked the 20th century. Part of that footprint consists of buildings and villages vacated by Mennonites when they emigrated or when their homes and properties were expropriated by Soviet authorities.

For example, the current inhabitants of Molochansk (called Halbstadt in pre-revolutionary times) are generally aware if they are living in a home built by Mennonites. They have learned to recognize the brick pattern (Flemish bond) that Mennonites used in construction. While they may be fuzzy about some of the details of the original owners, they are happy to share rumours about the “Mennonite times” with tourists passing through the area today looking for evidence of their Mennonite forebears.

One of the rumours in Molochansk is that a wealthy Mennonite businessman by the name of Heinrich Willms had a tunnel built to connect his mansion located in Neu-Halbstadt with his seven-storey flourmill located in Alt-Halbstadt. This tunnel supposedly ran through the Mennonite Credit Union building, located about half way between his house and his business.

My wife Mary and I learned of this rumor in October 2016, during the weeks we spent in Molochansk working with the Mennonite Centre, the non-profit humanitarian aid agency located in the renovated former Mennonite Girls’ School. The tunnel rumour piqued my interest and I began to make some inquiries about the Halbstadt tunnels.

The excuse to start an investigation into the tunnels began quite innocently. We were off to the Molochansk Sports School to look at some completed projects that had been financed by the Mennonite Centre and to talk to them about some pending requests for assistance. We have been a sustaining sponsor, enabling many of their athletes to attend major sporting events.

Even though the Sports School has equal numbers of boys and girls in their program, their funding requests have often favoured the boys. We wanted to encourage them to give equal opportunity for girls to



Mennonite Credit Union building in Molochansk (Halbstadt), now a Sports School, showing repaired stairs. Photo credit for all four images: Alvin Suderman.

attend major sporting competitions. In the process, we got to see the repaired steps that we had helped pay for, as well as an energetic workout by a gymnastics class. In this class, I recognized the daughter of Tanya, one of the Center’s employees. After many years of working for us, Tanya reluctantly acknowledged that she had a Mennonite grandmother with the surname of Peters.

The Molochansk Sports School is located in the former Mennonite Credit Union. The tunnel rumours always focus on this building and we took advantage of our visit to ask if we could examine the basement to see if there was any sign of tunnels. The staff was quite obliging and went to get the keys for the basement doors. We toured every room in the dark basement and heard many stories from the staff about why the tunnel entrances were now bricked over.

After our tour, I decided to get a sense of the distances between these buildings. Using the Mennonite Centre’s van, I drove from the old Franz and Schroeder machine factory (now a furniture factory and very close to the Willms mansion) to the Credit Union (Sports School); the odometer showed 0.8 kms. I kept driving and reached the Willms flourmill (now a milk canning operation); the odometer showed the total distance travelled to be 1.9 kms. That is a long tunnel!

The story from the staff at the Sports School was that many tunnels converged on the Credit Union building. There definitely was one that came from the former Mennonite Boys’ School across the street. It was big enough for a carriage to

pass through. The staff told us of an incident in 1982 or 1983 when some young boys decided to explore these tunnels. The tunnels had already been filled with sand, but the boys found a way of digging through the sand. One boy got lost and was not found for some hours. After that, the local authorities decided to get rid of the potential problem. The tunnel entrances in the Sports School were sealed with a brick wall.

The Sports School staff told us of another tunnel entrance that was built as part of a Mennonite house. It had its own unique gate and entrance. It was common for Mennonite homes to mark the entrance into their yard with large pillars or even a brick gate. A large ornate gate gave some indication of the wealth of the individual residing at that residence. This residence had an old brick gate marking just the entrance to the tunnel.

Our guide ran off to get the lady of the house to come and unlock the gate. She soon appeared with her key, but the old large padlock would not budge. This was not seen as a problem as they summoned a man from another residence who came with a large set of pliers. He gave the rusty old lock a couple of whacks and soon the key did its job and the gate was open. We stood there at the top of the stairs wondering who among us would be the first to venture down into this crumbling infrastructure.

I figured I was the most expendable and was the first to venture down the staircase. When I looked back, I could see that others were also curious. Soon everyone else in our group followed. Nobody wanted to miss this unique opportunity.

The stairway led to several large warehouse rooms that were totally



Tunnel entrance in the basement of the old Credit Union building, showing an opening in the bricked-over section.

underground. They were completely lined with brick, even the ceiling. One room had a sort of chimney that we were told functioned as an “elevator.” Goods could be directly raised or lowered into the underground warehouse by rope and pulley. We did not explore every room and I cannot say with certainty whether the underground warehouse led to other tunnels, but I suspect it did not. What amazed me was the expense the owner had gone to in creating this underground storage space. The large rooms were dry with no sign of flooding. It was an amazing discovery.

The underground warehouse was not a secret room. The entrance is not hidden and stands facing the street. Also, the actual construction could not have been done in secret; it required the excavation of the hole in which the warehouse was built. Probably, the excavation was done in stages. After the area spanning the circumference of warehouse was cleared and partially dug out, leaving a large mound in the center, an archway of bricks was placed on the mound of dirt. Then, once the mortar between the bricks had set, the earth under the bricks would have been excavated and placed on the archway, leaving an underground chamber ready to have the brick floor and walls installed. In the days before mechanized excavation, it would have been a labour-intensive undertaking.

What was most amazing about our exploration that day was the cooperation of the local people in Molochansk. When the Mennonite Centre opened 15 years ago, we were met with suspicion and some hostility. Not so anymore. The lady who owns the former Mennonite house on the property we were exploring was very open. She claimed to have documents for the house going back to 1905. I asked to see these and hoped it would give some clue as to who had lived there. At one time, this request would have been met with the suspicion that we were trying to reclaim the house. Now she just went to get her papers. Unfortunately, she could not find them, but promised to show me, if



Gated entrance at street level to stairs leading down to an underground warehouse.

she did. She did mention that she believed the house had a connection to the Herman Neufeld family that owned the local brewery.

On our walk home from this discovery, we met Vitally, the former maintenance man at the Centre. We told him of our exciting adventure and he started sharing his own stories of tunnels. He told us of two former Mennonite homes that were located beside the Mennonite Centre, but



Inside the underground warehouse, showing passageways to several rooms and daylight from the “chimney” visible at the top.

have now been demolished and replaced by a large apartment building. These homes had been connected by an underground tunnel. He told us of a tunnel connecting the Willms mansion and the nearby former Franz and Schroeder factory and that he had walked this tunnel himself.

So, is there a tunnel running from the Willms mansion all the way to the Willms flourmill 1.9 kms away? I still do not know for sure, but am developing a theory. I suspect that there were several tunnels connecting houses along the route from the Willms mansion to the Credit Union building and then on to the flourmill. Even the Mennonite Centre, which is on that route, has a tunnel-like structure running under the building and parallel to the roadway. This could at one time have been connected to adjoining buildings. I am beginning to think that there were so many tunnels that locals began to say that one could walk a tunnel all the way from the Willms mansion to the Willms flourmill—probably an exaggeration.

I would love to understand why these Mennonites made this large investment in underground structures, tunnels and warehouses. Was this also done elsewhere in Ukraine? There are many questions still to be answered.

Since I left Molochansk last fall, more information on potential tunnels has come to light. During my next visit to Molochansk, September through November 2017, I plan to invite the townspeople with some knowledge of the tunnels to the Mennonite Centre for an information-gathering meeting. I’d like to invite the Mayor of Molochansk, too. He is a strong supporter of the Mennonite Centre; maybe, with his authorization, I’ll be able to explore further the network of tunnels said to stretch from the Willms mansion to Willms flourmill.

Alvin and Mary Suderman serve as North American Directors of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine (www.mennonitecentre.ca). If you have information about the “Halbstadt tunnels,” Alvin would like to correspond with you. He can be reached at asuderman@mymts.net.

Book review

Benjamin W. Goossen, *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 266 pp.

Reviewed by Peter Letkemann, Winnipeg

Ben Goossen's *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era* is an ambitious and provocative attempt to examine the changing nature of Mennonite peoplehood and the extent of Mennonite involvement in the political, cultural, and social life in Germany and Russia (Soviet Union) from the mid-19th century to the present. Currently a PhD student in history at Harvard University, Goossen engages questions of warfare and pacifism, theology and political activism, gender, genocide, and anti-Semitism with the aim to explore new methods of narrating the processes of nationalization in a global era.

The book is a reworking and extension of Goossen's 2013 honours thesis at Swarthmore College, entitled: "Into a Great Nation: Mennonites and Nationalism in Imperial Germany, 1871–1900." Goossen's thesis itself was a continuation of the pioneering study published several years earlier by his mentor, Dr. Mark Jantzen, from North Newton, Kansas. Jantzen's *Mennonite German Soldiers* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2010) covered the significant developments and changes that took place among Mennonites in Prussia during the years 1772 to 1880.

However, rather than a measured and methodical historical study, Goossen's work is an interpretive essay full of factual errors and errors of interpretation. While some reviewers have characterized the book as "compelling" and "engaging," I found Goossen's practice of attaching "labels" to people and concepts, regardless of whether they are accurate, more troubling than helpful (e.g., inaccurately labelling Mennonite individuals as "nationalists," "pacifists," or "activists"; and characterizing Ukrainian Mennonites as "anti-Slavic" and "anti-Semitic").

When it comes to the label "Chosen Nation," it is unclear to what Goossen is referring. The label "nation" itself is a poor choice as translation of the German word *Volk* (xix). Mennonites were never a "nation" and should more accurately be referred to as a "people," using terms such as "peoplehood" or "ethnic peoplehood"

(199). German Mennonites formed distinct groups of "people" with a common language and religious beliefs, common cultural traits and practices. In terms of ethnic background or "race," most were of Flemish, Frisian, Swiss, or German descent, but in Prussian and Russian Mennonite communities, there were also persons of Polish/Slavic descent with names such as Sawatzky, Rogalsky, or Koslovsky. From the label "nation," Goossen then derives meaningless labels such as Mennonite "nationalists" or Mennonite "nationalism."

A second inaccurate label applied to Mennonites is the term "pacifist," which Goossen equates with the Mennonite religious doctrine of *Wehrlosigkeit* (xiii), which is translated as "non-resistance" or "non-participation" in war. At no time in the years before 1945 were Mennonites in Germany or Russia "pacifists." Their religious belief had nothing to do with the many "secular" pacifist movements that arose in Europe in the 19th century, associated for example, with men such as Émile Arnaud, who coined the word "pacifist" at the Tenth Universal Peace Congress in Glasgow in 1901. European Mennonites had nothing to do with any of these peace movements—no German Mennonite leader ever attended one of these peace congresses, and they were not reported on in the German Mennonite press.

A third inaccurate label is that of "activist," a word which is used to designate persons working and demonstrating actively for political and social change, persons such as Martin Luther King and other Civil Rights Leaders. Goossen applies the label first to a group of well-educated, affluent, urban professional Mennonite leaders from northern Germany, including Carl Harder, Hinrich v.d. Smissen, and Hermann Mannhardt; he even includes the 77-year-old historian and grandmother Antje Brons in this most inappropriate designation.

These individuals, representing the large, affluent urban Mennonite congregations in northern Germany—from Krefeld, Emden, Hamburg, Danzig, and Elbing to Königsberg—promoted the concept of "modernity" and the move of Mennonites into the mainstream of German society. They promoted their views especially in the periodical newspaper *Mennonitische Blätter*, encouraging Mennonites to consider themselves equal

members of a larger Prussian or German national collective; they should enjoy not only the privileges, but also the responsibilities of German citizenship—including involvement in the political life of the country and participation in military service in defence of the nation (48–49). Mennonite congregations in the large new German Empire were encouraged to unite in the Mennonite Union.

However, Mennonites in Germany before World War I were never the unified entity that Goossen tries to present. On the eve of WWI, no more than 37 of the 71 Mennonite congregations in the German Empire (representing about 70% of Mennonites) were members of the Union.

The dissenting voices of more "conservative" leaders from the smaller, rural congregations, as found in the south-German *Gemeindeblatt der Mennoniten* are practically ignored. Many of these congregations formed their own associations (*Verband*) or conferences and never joined the Mennonite Union.

In Chapters 4 to 6, Goossen goes beyond his original study to consider a variety of issues that arose during the thirty years from WWI, the Weimar Republic, and the Third Reich, to the end WWII. Goossen also extends his study beyond the borders of Germany to include Mennonites in Southern Russia (Ukraine). In this short review, I can comment on only a few of the many factual errors.

In the wake of the "Moscow Episode" in the fall of 1929, Goossen asserts that "Benjamin Unruh helped form Brethren in Need [*Brüder in Not*], a new aid association." In fact, *Brüder in Not* [BiN] had been organized under the auspices of the German Red Cross and other German Aid organizations in late 1921, and officially approved by government decree on 28 January 1922, in order to collect funds, food, clothing, etc. for the aid of Germans in Russia suffering under severe famine conditions. The BiN board included German Foreign Minister Walter Rathenau and other government officials, Protestant and Catholic Church representatives, Rabbi Dr. Baeck, as well as representatives of German agriculture, industry, art (Max Liebermann), and science (including Albert Einstein). Mennonites were not officially represented. The BiN organization went into "hibernation" when the worst had passed, but was revived again in November 1929 and continued on into the early 1930s

with Mennonite involvement, in order to assist with the desperate plight of Germans in Moscow and other parts of the Soviet Union.

One reviewer considered Goossen's discussion of Mennonites in the Third Reich as "a welcome addition to the conversation because so much of the existing work is in German." While Goossen is to be commended for daring to step into this "minefield," he unfortunately does nothing to defuse the "mines," and instead adds additional "mines" with provocative labels such as a "racial church" and "becoming Aryans." In fact, German Mennonites (and Russian Mennonites) had long seen theirs as a *Volkskirche* (a peoples' church, not a racial church), which had more to do with language, faith, and religious practice, culture, and tradition—not race.

Statements such as, "Mennonites generally welcomed the new Nazi government" (123) need to be placed into a more comprehensive and less "condemning" context. Much more detailed work needs to be done on collecting and examining archival sources and personal memoirs, drawing a more comprehensive interpretation. Work on this has begun recently at Mennonite conferences in Germany (2015) and Paraguay (2017), with a third conference scheduled for next year at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas.

Goossen's discussion in Chapter 6 of "Fatherland, War and Genocide in the Mennonite East [Ukraine]" is the weakest part of the book. He steps far beyond the borders of his expertise in Prussian Mennonite history and exhibits what one reviewer laments as a "minimal grasp of 20th-century Russian Mennonite history."

Mennonite involvement in the Holocaust in Ukraine is overblown. Mennonites as a whole were not "collaborators" or "anti-Semites." Villagers in the Mennonite colonies west of the Dnepr—Zagradovka, Shlakhtin-Baratov, Yazykovo, and Khortitsa—saw their Jewish neighbours pack up and flee eastward across the Dnepr; how many survived and how many were executed on the eastern side they did not know until later.

Direct involvement was limited to individuals, mostly young men; few, if any, were baptized or had Mennonite religious education. Many were probably acting in revenge for the way their fathers or other family members had been arrested and executed or exiled by the secret police. They were well aware that a large number of men and women of Jewish background worked as administrators, agents, and interrogators in the GPU/NKVD offices in southern Ukraine. Under the German *Ostministerium*, a handful of older Mennonite men also worked in the civil administration of the colonies.

Goossen also focuses especially on Benjamin Unruh's visit with *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler during the New Year of 1942/43, without providing important contextual details of what came before and after this meeting. Unruh could not but take advantage of an opportunity to speak with this powerful leader and his associates Lorenz and Hoffmeyer, who were influential leaders in the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*, which administered the Molochna and other German settlements east of the Dnepr, and which would later be in charge of the evacuation of all Mennonites and

Germans from Ukraine in late 1943 ("The Great Trek") as Soviet forces advanced westward toward the Reich. Unruh was in constant communication with these officials to ensure the well-being of his fellow Mennonites during this difficult time.

A fuller discussion of the Trek, Mennonite resettlement in the Warthegau and other German-occupied territories in Eastern Europe, as well as post-War resettlement will be found in my own forthcoming study of "Mennonite Refugees and Refugee Camps in Germany, 1918–1951."

The final chapter of Goossen's book is entitled (inappropriately) "Mennonite Nationalism." It focuses on efforts of MCC—especially C.F. Klassen and Peter J. Dyck in Europe and various leaders in USA and Canada—to provide aid to Russian and Prussian Mennonite refugees in post-war Germany, and to assist them in immigrating to Paraguay, Canada, Brazil, and USA. As in previous chapters, there are many "facts," assumptions, and interpretations that need further clarification, some of which will be dealt with in my aforementioned study.

Goossen concludes his book with a brief look at the current worldwide Mennonite community, especially relations between "white" (European and American) congregations in the Global North and "coloured" congregations in the Global South, and comments on the efforts of current progressive leaders to promote a new "sense of Mennonite peoplehood with diverse national, racial, and ethnic origins."

It is unfortunate that Princeton University Press could not have provided this young scholar with a better editorial team of persons with a more comprehensive grasp of German language, culture, and history (especially the years of the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich), of German Mennonite history, and especially of Russian/Soviet Mennonite history. Instead of "rushing" toward publication, they might have recommended he take more time to make significant changes in order to provide a more accurate and complete picture of Mennonites during this period.

