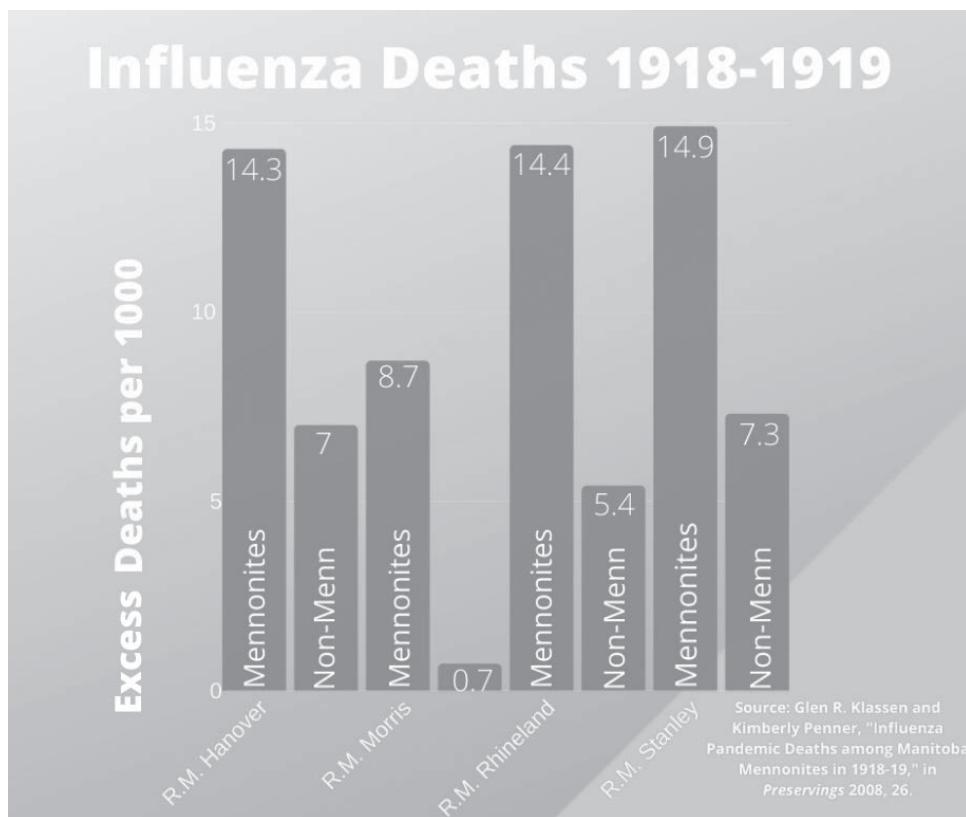


# Mennonite Historian

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



Research conducted in 2008 into the deadly impact of the 1918–1919 flu pandemic by Glen Klassen and Kimberly Penner showed Mennonites died at twice the rate as their neighbours in southern Manitoba. In this issue, starting on page 2, Glen Klassen reviews that earlier research and extends his analysis with an assessment of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

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## Now it's Here

by Glen R. Klassen, Steinbach

Twelve years ago, we had an H1N1 flu scare. Not much came of it then, but there was a lot of talk about readiness. You heard the familiar phrase: "It's not if; it's when."

Well, "when" is now.

COVID-19 is not the same as H1N1 in its pathology and in its high-risk targets. But both are air-borne and go for the lungs. Lungs fill with fluid and breathing becomes more and more difficult. H1N1 preferred young adults in their prime; COVID-19 kills the elderly.

In 2007, I was an adjunct professor at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) teaching biology. While the 2007 H1N1 flu scare was looming, CMU decided to have a conference for church people about pandemic readiness. Gordon Friesen and I along with others organized the gathering at CMU. Because the potential pandemic had not reached Manitoba, we were not worried about "social distancing" at the conference itself. Officials from all faith traditions attended. Muslims were especially interested and seemed to be leading the effort in some ways. Jews participated fully. Mennonites from most denominations showed up. But most people in the community were still not concerned

and many thought we were over-reacting. Press coverage was scant. However, we got federal government participation from Terry Duguid, who was then president of the International Centre for Infectious Diseases.

To boost awareness, I decided to do a study of the reaction of the religious community to the 1918 pandemic, especially in southern Manitoba, focusing on the "Mennonite" municipalities. My research assistant, Kimberly Penner, and I started to crunch the numbers and to gather stories from 1918, aided by a grant from the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation. What we found was rather surprising.<sup>1</sup>

First, we found that the flu had exacted a high toll, directly and indirectly. There were close to 60 deaths related to the flu in Hanover alone and something like 300 Mennonite deaths in all of Manitoba. The *Kleinegemeinde* (KG) *Ältester* in Steinbach, Peter R. Dueck, died prematurely at the age of 56, probably due to the strain of looking after church members during the worst of the influenza outbreak.<sup>2</sup> In those days, the *Ältester* had to travel regularly to serve communion, to baptize, to marry couples, and to attend the interminable ministerial meetings. While he did not die of the flu, he had to deal with a high level of stress due to closed churches, minimal funerals, and families deprived of their breadwinners. Young adults under the age of 40 were most vulnerable.

However, the big surprise came when we analysed the death data. Because this was supposed to be a study of religious response, we focused on the most easily identified religious group in southern Manitoba: the Mennonites. A study of Canada census data for 1916 and 1921 gave us the demographics we needed to locate all the Mennonites in Manitoba. In those years, only about 400 of them had dispersed from the "Mennonite" centres: Hanover, Rhineland, Stanley, and Morris. The death data came from Manitoba Vital Statistics online. In the death data, we identified Mennonites by name and place of death. Doubtless a few were misidentified. Contemporary news reports were also taken into account. Teacher Heinrich Rempel had compiled a list of Hanover deaths for the *Steinbach Post* in 1919,<sup>3</sup> and this list was updated and published in the *Mennonische Rundschau*.<sup>4</sup>

With all this data in hand, we started to calculate "excess death rates," a term

meaning the death rate exceeding the normal expected death rate. The normal expected death rate could be established by comparing deaths from all causes for several years before and after the epidemic. This baseline rate was very uniform across all communities in southern Manitoba and indeed, all of Canada. Sadly, the death of infants below the age of one accounted for 30 to 40 % of all deaths. They died mostly from the bacterial diseases for which we now have vaccines and antibiotics: diphtheria, scarlet fever, measles, croup, meningitis, and whooping cough. Adults were prone to typhoid, influenza, hepatitis, meningitis, tuberculosis, and wound infections. Smallpox was a threat in Manitoba in the late 1800s that affected some communities such as the Icelandic immigrants around Gimili. Others were spared due to a *cordon sanitaire* around Winnipeg.<sup>5</sup>

Deaths in excess of the baseline were considered to be flu-related, since it was abundantly clear to everyone that flu was rampant at that time. There is no indication that some other disease occurred at epidemic levels at that time. The actual cause of flu-related death in many cases may have been pneumonia or underlying tuberculosis.

The startling finding, confirmed by Vanessa Quiring at the University of Winnipeg,<sup>6</sup> was that Mennonites had a death rate that was twice as high as non-Mennonites and twice as high as the Canadian average. We showed that this was true within municipalities and between municipalities.

It would be helpful if we could know the number of people who got sick with the flu and recovered, but this data is simply not available. It is believed that about 60% of adults became very sick so that they could not attend to their farming. The great majority recovered. This missing data limits the interpretation of the death data. We cannot know whether Mennonite mortality rates reflect the morbidity rates. In other words, did more Mennonites get sick and so more died; or did just as many non-Mennonites get sick but fewer of them died. We do not have the data to resolve this. If the attack rate of the virus was the same for all Canadians, then the elevated death rate for Mennonites is troubling. Why? Because it implies that there was something physiological or genetic about

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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](mailto:jon.isaak@mbchurches.ca)  
or  
500 Shaftesbury Blvd.  
Winnipeg, MB R3P 2N2  
204.560.1998  
[cstoesz@marchives.ca](mailto:cstoesz@marchives.ca)  
[www.mennonitehistorian.ca](http://www.mennonitehistorian.ca)

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# Genealogy and Family History

## The Hamburg Passenger Lists, 1874–circa 1900

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

Mennonite immigrants coming to North America in the 19th century had to do so via ship. Therefore, the so-called ship lists, which list passengers on these ships, should be an important source of genealogical information. The vast majority of Mennonites coming into Canada between 1874 and about 1900 came through the port of Quebec City. The ships that brought immigrants to Quebec City also deposited their passenger lists. These lists have survived to the present day and are available to the public.<sup>1</sup>

The ships bound for Canada brought European immigrants via ports in the United Kingdom. Those who were not British immigrants had to find their way to England. Most of the Mennonites that immigrated to Canada between 1874 and about 1900 did so via Hamburg. These people sailed from the port of Hamburg to the port of Hull in the UK, took a train across England, and then finally boarded a ship from Liverpool to Quebec City or Halifax. The ships sailing from Hamburg to British ports also had their own ship lists.<sup>2</sup>

This means that the majority of those Mennonites who immigrated from Russia to Canada during this time period are found on two passenger lists. Most Mennonite genealogists are familiar with the Quebec City ship lists, which have been transcribed and corrected, starting already in the 1970s. It is the name of the ship arriving at Quebec City that is usually listed in the “immigration” part of the GRANDMA database.<sup>3</sup> Many are unaware of the Hamburg ship lists or have not been able to access the Hamburg lists in the past.

One important difference between the Quebec City and Hamburg lists is that the Quebec lists were written by English speakers, often resulting in badly misspelled names of the German-speaking Mennonite passengers. The Hamburg lists were constructed by Germans and usually give a more accurate rendering of the passenger’s name. In addition to this, the handwriting in the Hamburg lists is much easier to read and contains fewer errors in

ages. The biggest, and most genealogically important, difference is that, for most of the 1880s and 1890s, the Hamburg lists provide the village of origin for each family! The Quebec City lists simply give “Russia” as the place of origin.

Figure 1 shows the Quebec and Hamburg lists for my great-great-grandfather, Bernhard Penner (1820–1896; GM#183027). The Hamburg list is accurate. The Quebec City list gives the family name as Benner and incorrectly calls son Daniel, David. It also shows less accurate ages.

Figure 2 shows the Hamburg list for an Abram Redekop (1855–1911; GM#176953). This list shows that the family came from Neuosterwick (usually called Osterwick), which was in the Chortitzia Colony in Russia. This new information is not found in the GRANDMA database.

At this time, the only complete online collection of Hamburg ship lists is found on the Ancestry.com website. This is a pay site that requires an annual membership, although trial memberships are usually available.<sup>4</sup> I have taken an earlier list, made before Ancestry.com came onto the scene, and expanded it in order to include the village of origin for some 1,123 Mennonites who immigrated from Russia to Prussia to North America, through the Port of Hamburg from 1890 through 1899. This list is now available online.<sup>5</sup>

### Endnotes

1. See: <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/immigration-records/passenger-lists/passenger-lists-quebec-port-1865-1900/Pages/search.aspx>.

2. There are also passenger lists for those passing through England for the years after 1890, which are also available at ancestry.com.

3. For more information on the GRANDMA database, see: [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Orenburg\\_Mennonite\\_Settlement\\_\(Orenburg\\_Oblast,\\_Russia\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Orenburg_Mennonite_Settlement_(Orenburg_Oblast,_Russia)).

4. See: <https://www.ancestry.ca/cs/offers/freetrial>.

5. See: [http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/canada/Port\\_of\\_Hamburg\\_1890s.pdf](http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/canada/Port_of_Hamburg_1890s.pdf).

Quebec City (1875)	Hamburg (1895)
Bernhard	✓ 55
Justina	✓ 16
Aaron	✓ 16
Susanna	✓ 14
Catharina	✓ 11
Margaretha	✓ 9
Bernhard	✓ 7
David	✓ 3
Justinus	✓ 2
Anna	✓ 1 1/2

Penner	Bernhard	Age
✓ 55	✓ 55	
✓ 16	✓ 16	
✓ 14	✓ 14	
✓ 11	✓ 11	
✓ 9	✓ 9	
✓ 7	✓ 7	
✓ 3	✓ 3	
✓ 2	✓ 2	
✓ 1 1/2	✓ 1 1/2	

Figure 1: The Quebec City (upper) and Hamburg (lower) ship lists for the family of Bernhard Penner (1820–1896; GM#183027) who emigrated from Russia to Canada in 1875.

Redekoppe	Abraham	Age	Neuosterwick
✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	Katherina	✓	✓
✓	Peter	✓	✓
✓	Johann	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓

Figure 2: The Hamburg ship list for the family of Abram Redekop (1855–1911; GM#176953) who emigrated from Russia to Canada in 1892. Note that the village of origin is given.

## Now it's Here

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Mennonites that made the virus more life-threatening. If the attack rate for Mennonites was higher than the average—and that is why more of them died—then social and environmental factors would be implicated. The same applies to the very high death rates in indigenous communities.<sup>7</sup>

How can we account for the elevated death rate among Mennonites? If it is related to social behaviour, then we must find something they do that other populations do not do. According to Maria R. Dueck of Grünfeld, who kept a detailed diary from 1917 to 1923,<sup>8</sup> it is clear that Mennonites had a very active social life that did not change much even though the epidemic was raging.

I suspect, but cannot prove, that the higher death rates were due to social factors. There is very little evidence that the everyday lives of the neighbours of the Mennonites—whether Anglophone, Francophone, or Ukrainian—were much different from theirs. They ate the same diet, worked at the same jobs, had very large families, lived in small houses, had a similar attitude to sanitation, and were equally rich or poor. What could have been different for Mennonites?

I recently got access to the 1918 roster of church meetings for the Chortitzer Church in Manitoba.<sup>9</sup> There were nine officiating ministers who took turns at 14 assembly sites (not necessarily church buildings). The KG and the Holdeman (Church of God in Christ, Mennonite) churches followed the same practise.<sup>10</sup> Everyone had a printed copy of the church schedule and Maria Dueck of Grünfeld (KG) writes in her diary that people tended to follow their favourite ministers from site to site.

According to the church service schedule, Chortitzer members from the northern villages of the East Reserve (ER) met at the Chortitz church on October 20 for the communion preparation service (*Bereitung*) and on October 27 for the actual communion service (*Abendmahl*). Members from the southern villages met at Grünthal on October 13 and October 20 for the same purposes. These were relatively large gatherings because members were expected to attend both services and about half of them did. The venues must



**Chortitz Heritage Church, Randolph, Manitoba.** Photo credit: From the document collection of Ernest Braun.

have been quite crowded over the lengthy service. And then there was the use of handkerchiefs. These were supposed to be freshly laundered, but they came out of pockets and purses that were not sterile and were used publically for nose-blowning and reused as often as necessary. Before that, of course, they were used to wipe the common communion cup and to receive the bread from the bare hands of the minister or deacon. For the Chortitzer, these services took place twice a year, in May/June and in October. In Maria Dueck's diary, the first report of flu illness came from Chortitz. The first typical flu death, that of 21-year-old Peter L. Kehler, occurred in Blumengard(t), a village within the Chortitz orbit and also the site of one of the Chortitzer church buildings. The Chortitz and Grünthal all-church meetings may well be implicated in the early spread of the epidemic.

After the services, which Chortitzer churches held in the morning, most people took the opportunity to visit relatives for *Meddach* (lunch). And then other relatives or friends came for *Faspa*. By the time they hitched up the horses and got on their sleighs, there was only one degree of separation between anyone and anyone else in that part of the Reserve.

In Maria Dueck's diary, we find that in addition to church services (which were cancelled between October 17 and December 1 in the ER) there was at least

one wedding, a two-day pig slaughtering event, numerous funerals (when they were not illegal), a number of church *Bruderschaft* meetings, a well-attended Christmas concert in Hochstadt, and then a packed church for the burial service of *Ältester* Peter R. Dueck on January 22. He had died on January 7, but the coffin had not been covered to allow his brother Bernhard to see him before complete burial.<sup>11</sup> Bernhard R. Dueck was a minister in Rosenort and was probably delayed because the epidemic struck Rosenort in early January, a full month or two after its onset in Hanover.

On top of all these gatherings of different combinations of people, there was incessant and extreme social interaction. Maria's entry for Friday, December 27 reads: "Good weather. We had guests, namely: Jacob R. Duecks, Peter R. Duecks, Isaac W. Reimers, Klaas R. Friesen, Heinrich R. Reimers, Peter Kroekers, Aron Reimers, and Aunt Friesen. In the evening, Tina, Anna, and I went to Diedrich I. Duecks." Maria helped to entertain at least 15 adults and who knows how many children on a Friday, and then she went visiting herself! Often guests would stay overnight.

Dr. Ken Kliewer of Altona pointed out that in addition to this socializing, the epidemic itself precipitated another type of social contact: namely, farmers would

(cont'd on p. 8)

## Helping Establish MCC in Yugoslavia

by Richard Penner, Saskatoon

It was an unusually warm spring in Europe in 1965. Snow, especially in the alpine regions, melted quickly, putting most rivers under considerable pressure as they carried large volumes of water to their final destinations. The Danube River in particular caused substantial damage as it meandered from west to east for eventual drainage into the Black Sea. A relatively flat, open area in northern Yugoslavia was especially hard hit. It is a rich, agricultural area dotted by many small villages. The mostly adobe houses melted like butter as the water rushed in. It seemed that the Black Sea had advanced westward by about 800 kilometres.

I was in Germany at the time, doing some post-university work in agriculture. Of Mennonite background—23 years old, from southern Alberta—I had learned about the Yugoslavian tragedy through the news and especially through the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) office in Frankfurt, where Peter Dyck was the director. I visited the MCC office from time to time; it was a place to be in contact with North Americans and to secure a free, overnight bed.

There was hardly an organized Mennonite presence in communist Europe at the time. Most Mennonites living in Ukraine had “emigrated” to Germany with the retreating German army near the end of

World War II. Some of them had been repatriated back to USSR, not to their former homes in Ukraine, but rather to scattered labour camps, mostly in Siberia.

Now it was 1965 and MCC was especially keen on re-establishing a relationship in the communist world where MCC had experienced its birth in 1920. Peter (Mr. MCC after all!) thought that perhaps helping with flood relief could be such a re-entry key. I said that if the job

involved doing an initial survey of the need and coming up with suggestions for how MCC could help, that was something I could do—as long as I was back in Canada by Christmas 1965. My offer was accepted.

I put on my MCC hat, got on my motorcycle, and headed east. I was to report to the Yugoslav Red Cross in Belgrade, the capital city, from where the request for help had come to MCC. I visited the hardest hit areas and reported back to Peter in Frankfurt. Peter reported to MCC in Akron, Pennsylvania. The



Richard Penner (right) with Yugoslav agronomists in 1965, reviewing hybrid corn varieties brought in by MCC for testing. Photo credit for all three images in this article: Richard Penner.

worst damage was a large, flat agricultural area called Vojvidina, north of Belgrade. Primary crops there were corn, sunflowers, and potatoes. Most of the people there lived in small villages in houses of predominantly adobe construction. These houses dissolved in the flood waters, so there were major population relocations necessary. My reports requested mainly clothing, blankets, canned food, potatoes, and agricultural planting seed. Soon MCC supplies started arriving, mostly from the U.S. and Canada. The Yugoslav Red Cross was responsible for the distribution of this aid.

In the meantime, I was busy trying to figure out ways to make an MCC presence in this country more permanent. I discovered some new well-drilling equipment that had originally been donated by the World Council of Churches, but subsequently abandoned. It was clear to me that fresh water was going to be a problem in the flooded area and that the dislocated people would need places to live. It was decided that new villages would have to be built. Peter found an experienced well-driller in the U.S. who was willing to come help the Yugoslavs dig new village wells with that newly acquired drilling machine.

I was also keen on getting a student exchange program going between Yugoslavia and the U.S. & Canada. Peter

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An official of the Yugoslav Red Cross (left) discussing impact of flood with villagers. Their destroyed home is in the background.

## Connie Wiebe reflects on 26 years at the Mennonite Heritage Archives

by Dan Dyck, Winnipeg

**R**elationships, said Connie Wiebe, defined her tenure at the Mennonite Heritage Archives (formerly Mennonite Heritage Centre).

For twenty-six years, this mother, grandmother, and farmer's wife greeted everyone from international academics and researchers to local visitors looking for family connections with a cheerful smile and a good word in person and on the phone.

Wiebe helped individuals, families, and churches find what archivists call "records" but are really stories, stories of life, love, family, and faith as told in letters, photos, and sometimes artifacts. Each visitor Wiebe encountered was a story archeologist, looking to unearth and interpret the meaning of their histories.

The bones of Mennonite people who survived migrations, famines, and wars are buried under engraved tombstones with the briefest of epitaphs. But this is not where their legacy lives on, said Wiebe.

The Mennonites, who helped turn the Canadian prairie into the breadbasket of North America, shaped schools, congregations, and disaster & relief organizations. Their life stories are preserved in file folders and boxes—in handwritten German script, typeset Gothic typefaces, and government documents, often in the Russian language. Many remain in basements and church storage closets, passed on through the generations.

It is the progeny of these ancestors and repeat visitors who first encountered Wiebe as the face of the MHA. Here she met and made friends, encouraged them when illness struck and loved ones were lost, celebrated their weddings and the births of children and grandchildren. That's the kind of thing one can do with a long-term presence; for Wiebe, it became a sort of pastoral role, wrapped up in guest reception, way-finding, and hospitality provision.

While discretion prevents her from sharing details, Wiebe recalls with heartfelt fondness the elderly man who arrived one day looking for traces of his lost love from decades ago. The woman was found and contacted by archives staff, but declined contact with the lonely man from her past—a love story unresolved.

There were families looking for long lost relations: siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, often separated by world events over which they had no control—and tales of joyful reunifications. In a few cases, cradle Mennonites adopted into non-Mennonite families as children arrived at Wiebe's desk looking for clues to their heritage or biological family. Others arrived seeking the genealogical history of their ancestors, on a quest to understand what shaped their parents and their own identities.

And books. So many books have been shaped and fleshed out by researchers, academics, and family historians with Wiebe's way-finding help. As knowledgeable as any assistant a researcher could hope for, the compassionate, tiny-framed Wiebe helped innumerable authors quickly and efficiently retrieve important documents stored on towering shelves in a high-ceilinged vault the size of several school classrooms.

In a north-facing study room lit with large windows at the archives, students of history at Canadian Mennonite University found themselves sharing life challenges with the maternally inclined Wiebe, who says she often put on her mothering hat to coach and nurture young adults trying to figure out their path in life. As a student supervisor, the mother of two daughters, a



**Connie Wiebe, MHA and MHC Gallery administrative assistant, 1992–2019.** Photo credit: Canadian Mennonite University

son, and now a grandmother of five said, "Interacting with them was a natural fit for me because my children had attended CMU and were maybe five to ten years older than the [students] were, so I often was there listening to their woes and issues, giving motherly advice; and they kept coming back, [and] they wanted to come back."

As a committee member in her own congregation, she relates a recent meeting where members wondered how they would ever find certain historical documents that might inform a current decision. Because her congregation had regularly submitted its records to the MHA, Wiebe knew precisely where to look. Still passionate about congregational history, she urges churches to send yearbooks, annual reports, and church bulletins to the MHA. Though these documents can seem dull and valueless to the contributor, they are a treasure trove for historians, who will tell the story of a faithful people to future generations.

Our conversation ends as Wiebe's husband, Kurt, enters the room with a grandson in tow. Wiebe is deeply grateful for the relationships and friendships that overlapped, work, church, and family, that enlarged her circles of love and care; but now it is a time to re-focus on her own, immediate family.



**John M. Schmidt (1918-2008), one of the early MB radio preachers, recording a Gospel Light Hour broadcast in the early 1950s from the Logan Ave. (MB) Mission Church, Winnipeg. He recorded after 10 pm to avoid traffic noises.** Photo credit: MAID CA CMBS NP191-01-74.

## Online Research Resources

by Jon Isaak

My COVID-19 adaptation in March and April has been to work from home—writing file descriptions, scanning photos, editing encyclopedia articles, and updating the websites I manage. And I still go to the archives each week. I work alone, so physical distancing at the archives is not difficult; but, yes, CMBS is closed to the public, until further notice.

Since many are spending more time online these COVID days, I have been promoting the many Anabaptist-Mennonite online resources available for historical research. For example, (1) I finished scanning the 112 images in the John M. Schmidt photo collection—he is one of the Mennonite radio broadcasters that David Balzer wrote about in the March 2020 *Mennonite Historian*, now online at [www.mennonitehistorian.ca/](http://www.mennonitehistorian.ca/). And those photographs are now viewable online at (2) the MAID website, <https://archives.mhsc.ca/john-m-schmidt-photograph-collection-2>.

I also edited a biography of Schmidt for posting to (3) the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO), [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Schmidt,\\_John\\_M.\\_\(1918-2008\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Schmidt,_John_M._(1918-2008)), and updated the file description for Schmidt's personal papers fonds at (4) the CMBS website, [http://cmbs.mennonitebrethren.ca/personal\\_papers/schmidt-john-m-1918-2008/](http://cmbs.mennonitebrethren.ca/personal_papers/schmidt-john-m-1918-2008/).

And I scanned 16 additional Mennonite history books, uploading them to (5) the Internet Archive, bringing the total to 96 e-books readable online, <https://archive.org/details/@jonisaak>.

That makes five different websites—accessible to researchers anywhere with internet service!

Looking for a baptism photo, obituary of a loved one, or a book, magazine article, or church decision on some theological issue—there are online research resources available. This is usable history, the best kind!



**A family photograph taken in 1965 of the Toby and Lena Voth family. Pictured (l-r) are Arlene, Jeanne, Lena, Toby, Danny, and Audrey. Their fifth child, Sandra, was born later. See letter to the editors below.** Photo credit: MAID CA CMBS NP214-01-29.

*Dear Conrad and Jon,  
I thoroughly enjoyed the article in the March 2020 Mennonite Historian regarding the Mennonite radio in Manitoba. This is how it was in my family. We did not have a TV growing up and so instead of watching Hockey Night in Canada on Saturday evenings, the Voth children, all 5 of us, sat in front of the radio and listened to the stories told by Uncle Toby, our Dad. He was a star. Kids would go all nuts if they figured out that Uncle Toby was our father. He also sang in the CBMC (Christian Business Men's Committee) quartet for 40 years; my Mom was the accompanist and they regularly sang on the Gospel Light Hour. I remember very well going to the studio on Henderson Highway in Winnipeg. Both my parents also sang in the Gospel Light Hour choir and other musical Mennonites were our friends. Many Sundays we were given rides and taken care of with other children, while all our parents went on deputation to other churches in southern Manitoba. John M. Schmidt and my father were very good friends and this overflowed into our family life. There were many occasions of celebration and various activities with the Schmidt family. This article brought back long-forgotten memories. Thank you!  
Audrey Voth Petkau, TourMagination, Waterloo, Ontario*

## Now it's Here

(cont'd from p. 4)

go from farm to farm to help out their sick neighbours, and women would go from house to house to help out sick women and their families, providing another potential type of transmission.<sup>12</sup>

I suspect that this pattern of social interaction in a very close-knit community led to exponential spread of the virus and significantly raised the attack rate of the virus as compared with non-Mennonite communities. The higher attack rate led to an elevated death rate.

To prove this hypothesis, it would be necessary to analyse social interactions in other ethnic communities in Manitoba and in Canada. The municipalities and communities surrounding the ER (RM of Hanover) were mostly Francophone, but there were also some Ukrainian and Anglophone communities. The communities around Rhineland (Altona area) and Stanley (Winkler area) were mostly Anglophone. In the RM of Morris, Mennonites were a minority within a largely Anglophone community. Some of these communities contained small minorities of ethnic Germans and a few Jews.

The Francophone communities around Hanover are an interesting case in point. It appears that they had a very low death rate due to the flu—much lower than the Canadian average. Was their pattern of church attendance the cause? It is likely that those who attended church did so in the same venue week after week, meeting more-or-less the same combination of people. This may contrast with Mennonites whose church contacts would vary each week. And Catholics did not use the common communion cup. They probably socialized just as much as the Mennonites, but again, probably just within the same local group. More research needs to be done to confirm the very low death rates and the social interactions.

How was the 1918 epidemic different from COVID-19? First, the high-risk group was different. In 1918, it was mostly young adults; now it is the elderly, especially men. Second, COVID-19 seems to be more virulent, although we still do not know the actual death rates due to lack of random testing. H1N1 was often fatal due to secondary infections such as pneumonia or underlying tuberculosis. COVID seems

to be able to destroy lung tissue without the help of these bacteria. Thus, our modern antibiotics may not help the severe cases of COVID. Third, we are much more sensitive to the death of our relatives since in our day it is so rare. Fourth, we are much more dependent on the supply chain for food and medicines than they were. Most of them were self-sufficient on the farm. Marie Dueck's diary shows that farming activity was largely unhindered by the flu, except in those cases where most of the family was too sick to care for farm animals. This was temporary and there were always neighbours to help. Fifth, the 1918 epidemic subsided relatively quickly because the majority became sick at about the same time. Thus, a large part of the population became immune and acted as a buffer for those who were still susceptible. In our case, we are sensibly “flattening the curve,” but the consequence is that we are preserving susceptibility and preventing the development of “herd immunity.” Sixth, we have a much more robust health care system than they did.

What mistakes were made in the current crisis? Obviously, society was complacent and did not heed the warnings. Back in 2007, the CMU community tried very hard to prepare churches for a viral catastrophe, but hardly anyone listened. Then we had the Ebola threat in 2014, but it more-or-less stayed in West Africa. There was also SARS in 2003, but we got on top of that, and MERS in 2012, and ZIKA in 2015, but none came too close to us to cause much alarm. We should be grateful for the scientists and politicians who dealt successfully with these potential disasters.

All these near misses gave us a false sense of security. Why were we so late in restricting travel, especially from the epicentre? We had also forgotten about two other viruses that got out of control earlier: Polio in the 1950s and AIDS more recently. We did not realize that when scientists encounter a newly emerging disease, it takes time to identify the agent, to sequence its DNA or RNA, and to study its proteins as possible antigens for the production of a vaccine.

This lack of preparedness is most stark in our inability to test for the COVID virus quickly. Epidemiologists were essentially working in the dark for at least the first month. This is no one's fault because you cannot stockpile a test for an unknown threat. But we could have

stockpiled personal protective equipment as well as intensive care machines. We also should always have the infrastructure and personnel at hand to communicate with the public effectively. Although this involves great cost, we now realize that it is a false economy not to do it. Travel restriction policies and laws should be in place for instant implementation. It is also important not to lay blame too quickly on public servants or to take revenge at the ballot box.

What lessons does the 1918 pandemic offer? First, it shows how quickly a respiratory virus can cause a disaster: i.e., within a week or two. Second, it shows that a tight-knit community with lots of socializing is at elevated risk. Third, it shows that public scepticism should not deter us from taking expensive measures to prepare for the future. Fourth, it shows us that caregivers within society, such as health care workers and pastors, can be easily exhausted by expectations. And fifth, it shows that a slow reaction by governments can cost a lot of lives and a lot of wealth. Thankfully, in our society, lives still matter most.

*Glen Klassen, Ph.D., is a retired microbiologist living in Steinbach. He has done research on epidemics of the past, especially those of the 1918 flu and diphtheria in southern Manitoba.*

### Endnotes

1. Glen R. Klassen and Kimberley Penner, “1918 Flu Epidemic,” *Preservings* 28 (2008): 24.

2. Glen R. Klassen and Kimberley Penner, “The Last Days of Ältester Peter R. Dueck,” *Preservings* 27 (2007): 86.

3. Heinrich Rempel, *Steinbach Post*, January 29, 1919.

4. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, February 12, 1919.

5. James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (University of Regina Press, 2013).

6. Vanessa Quiring, “Mennonites, Community and Disease: Mennonite Diaspora and Responses to the 1918–1920 Influenza Pandemic in Hanover, Manitoba” (MA Thesis, University of Winnipeg, 2015).

7. Ann Herring, “There were Young People and Old People and Babies Dying Every Week: The 1918–1919 Influenza Pandemic at Norway House,” *Ethnohistory* 41/1 (1994): 73–105.

8. Translated by Henry Fast, originals in the possession of Levi Isaac.

9. Ernest Braun, Tourond, Manitoba.

10. Royden Loewen, *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition 1874–1982* (The Blumenort Mennonite Historical Society, 1990), 170.

11. Bodies were sometimes kept for weeks or months if immediate burial was not desired or possible. They were either wrapped and kept outside in the cold, or they were buried in stored grain.

12. Ernest Braun, Tourond, Manitoba.

## MCC in Yugoslavia

(cont'd from page 5)

supported the idea. I had developed a strong relationship with the Red Cross director in Ljubljana. His name was Adam Gruenfeld, and he was also interested in this exchange program. Application forms were developed and soon young people on both sides of the Atlantic were being interviewed. I do not know how this program evolved, as I left before it became active.

While MCC relief and reconstruction efforts were underway, I received an especially urgent message from Peter, requesting I set up a personal meeting “with the highest communist government official you can find.” Peter knew that in an authoritarian country like Yugoslavia, it was important to have support from those as near to the top as possible. Well, that should be easy for a neophyte kid from the Canadian prairies, I sarcastically thought. Somehow, with the help of the Yugoslav Red Cross, I managed to arrange for such a meeting. So it was that by September 1965, Peter and I were going up a rickety elevator in a tall building in downtown Belgrade.

Peter Dyck was an unusually “high energy” kind of person and he was quite worked up about this meeting. As we were going up the elevator, I remember him telling me in no uncertain terms: “Now Richard, this is a very critical meeting; just remember, I’ll do all the talking!”

We were ushered into the social area of a huge office and were soon joined by a very imposing, rough-looking but well-dressed man. I do not remember his name or position, but it was clear that this was

one of President Josip Broz’s (known as “Tito”) right-hand men.

After a few pleasantries, Peter started in with an explanation of who Mennonites were. The man put up the palm of his hand and said, “Mr. Dyck, don’t worry; I know all about Mennonites. We invited you because yours is the only religious group we know that puts their convictions in their back pocket and works hard to help people in need without conditions. You are very welcome in our country.”

Immediately, there was a relaxed atmosphere in the meeting that went on for quite a while. As we left, this man assured us that we had the full support of his government and if any circumstance arose that we felt was interfering with this relationship, we should immediately get in direct telephone contact with him, personally. Peter was quite pleased with the meeting, as was the head MCC office in Akron. We also reported the good outcome of the meeting to the Yugoslav Red Cross officials with whom we had been working and their cooperation improved markedly. What this shows me is the unique reputation Mennonites have developed as we go about helping others with real actions and not just words. We can be very proud of and should strongly support Mennonite organizations such as MCC, MDS (Mennonite Disaster Service), and MEDA (Mennonite Economic Development Associates). Actions really do speak louder than words.

*Richard Penner is a retired Agronomist and lifelong advocate for MCC, especially this year that marks MCC's 100th anniversary.*

## Cornies and Engelbrecht on Schools and Rules

by Arnold Neufeldt-Fast, Toronto

Most accounts of Johann Cornies point to his “rules” and comparison of two schools as proof of his pedagogical genius. James Urry’s discovery of Engelbrecht as Cornies’s source will require a significant reconsideration of this view (see *Mennonite Historian*, Dec. 2019, p.10). As Urry suggests, as a first step, I examined the relationship between Cornies’s and Engelbrecht’s accounts in greater detail.

In Cornies’s description of a good and a poor school, he made only a few small edits of Engelbrecht’s original version appropriate to Cornies’s context. He replaced Engelbrecht’s village names—“Shadow Valley” and “Good Mountain”—with the letters “X” and “A.” The phrase “obligations of the citizen (*Bürger*)” became the “obligations of the congregation member (*Gemeindeglied*).” Cornies deleted a reference “to making the sign of the cross,” but retained a reference to memorizing the Lord’s Prayer. Cornies left unedited Engelbrecht’s established Catholic approach to the knowledge of God, such as in his reference to “natural religion” and to learning from the book of nature with the help of reason. Catholics do not have a radical view of the fall and original sin; correspondingly, Engelbrecht’s entire presentation worked with the metaphor of growth and seeds, as in faith and growth in the image of God. This also remained unchanged in the Cornies text.

That said, in one of the rules, Cornies replaced Engelbrecht’s term “love for his holy law” with “love for his Word revealed to human beings.” In doing so, Cornies added a Protestant emphasis on revelation and downplayed divine law. However, Cornies did not draw on the writings of other contemporary Christian educationalists, such as those of the more pietist August Franke. If, as has been suggested, Cornies experienced a conversion to pietism, this might have been expected.

Engelbrecht’s “General Rules for Instruction and Handling of Children” included 90 short directives or rules. Franz Isaac’s version of Cornies’s documents suggested there were 88 rules; D.H. Epp’s biography of Cornies gave 87. Isaac did not include three of Engelbrecht’s rules (no. 29, 30, and 49) and split one rule (no. 80) into two, for a total of 88 rules; D.H.



**Yugoslav workers making adobe bricks for reconstruction after the flood.**

Epp's version did not include rule no. 13. Cornies made some significant edits to Engelbrecht's rules: in no. 34, he added 15 words; in no. 45, he removed 16 words and added 42; in no. 66, he deleted 12 words; in no. 80, two key words were changed; and in rule no. 90, 12 words were added and 6 deleted. The remaining are copied without significant change.

#### Endnotes

1. Compare with, for example, Menno S. Harder, "A Pioneer Educator—Johann Cornies," *Mennonite Life* 3, no. 4 (1948): 5–7, 44, <https://mla.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/pre2000/1948oct.pdf>; and Leonhard Froese, "Johann Cornies' pädagogischer Beitrag," *Der Evangelischer Erzieher* 6, no. 6 (1954): 172–176, <http://chort.square7.ch/Buch/Corn4.pdf>.

2. Augustin Engelbrecht, *Aufsätze pädagogischen Inhalts. Ein Buch für Seelsorger und Volksschullehrer zur angenehmen und belehrenden Unterhaltung* (Landshut: Krüll, 1821), 229–249, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=ZTINAAAAcAAJ&lpg>.

3. In D.H. Epp, *Johann Cornies: Züge aus seinem Leben und Wirken* [1909], *Historische Schriftenreihe*, Buch 3 (Rosthern, SK: Echo, 1946), 58–68, <http://chor.square7.ch/1dok15.pdf>; copied from Franz Isaac, *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte derselben* (Halbstadt, Taurien: H.J. Braun, 1908), 280–289, <https://mla.bethelks.edu/books/MolotschnaerMennoniten/>. Cornies adds "for the school teachers of the Molotschna Mennonite District." He does not include Engelbrecht's footnote: namely, that "these rules, which I will give here in short briefs, are taken from the writings of the well-known educators of our time."

## Mennonite Archival Database Gets Boost with Five New Partners.

The online Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID) <https://archives.mhsc.ca> is adding five new institutional partners to the existing nine. The newly expanded database features thousands of historic photos and a quickly expanding number of entries describing one-of-a-kind letters, diaries, meeting minutes, travel documents, biographies, audio and video recordings, and more—all accessible to the public.

The new members are Mennonite Central Committee [Canada (Winnipeg, MB) and USA (Akron, PA)], Mennonite Church USA Archives (Elkhart, IN), Bethel College Mennonite Library and Archives (North Newton, KS), Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society (Hubbard, OR), and Goshen College

Archives (Goshen, IN). The four American archival collections were featured in the "Mennonite Archival Commons" online project but are migrating their data to MAID.

Jason Kauffman of Mennonite Church USA archives in Elkhart says, "MAID provides an opportunity to join forces with an established consortium with broad institutional support and a common goal of making information and content from our collections more accessible to the public."

Chantel Fehr and Frank Peachy of Mennonite Central Committee agree. "We are thrilled to work together with other institutions that are committed to preserving the records that document Mennonite history through the Mennonite Archival Information Database."

The online archive was founded by Canadian partners in 2015 as a photographic database to help archival institutions manage their collections and provide public access to historic material. "When MAID was launched, we dreamed about its potential to include more Mennonite partners. We are thrilled that other archives have also seen this and look forward to collaborating with them to provide an enhanced online service to anyone wanting to explore Mennonite history," says MAID site administrator Laureen Harder-Gissing of the Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

With the power of a central database that can link records in multiple repositories together, researchers will benefit from new leads and resources. In a world of shrinking institutional budgets, a cooperative approach that pools financial and human resources is vital. The database is not only for researchers, but, as John Thiesen of Bethel College notes, "it might contribute to a closer interaction among the North American Mennonite archives and historical libraries." Kauffman is appreciative of the development of MAID. "I hope that we can build on the amazing work that MAID has already accomplished and eventually share more content from our collections online, including audio records, video, and documents." Visitors to the site can expect to see MAID's content expand over the next few months.

## Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) met in Quebec on January 17 and 18 and discussed several new projects, including a history book of Mennonites in Canada since 1970 and a cross-Canada celebration of the centenary of the arrival of Russian Mennonites in 2023.

Building on MHSC's November 2018 history conference "A People of Diversity: Mennonites in Canada Since 1970," the Society invited Brian Froese and Laureen Harder-Gissing to co-author a book on Mennonites in Canada from 1970–2020. Froese teaches history at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, and Harder-Gissing is Archivist-Librarian at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo.

Plans are proceeding for the Russlaender Centenary project. The main feature of the commemoration is a cross-Canada train trip in 2023, beginning in Quebec City with stops and events planned across the country. Participants can choose to be on all or any of the segments of the journey, or be involved when the travellers arrive in their part of the country.

MHSC also chose to recognize the migration of Mennonites from Canada to Mexico and Paraguay in 1922, the largest ever mass emigration from Canada. Events, exhibits, and a conference are planned for 2022.

This year the MHSC award of excellence was presented to Lucille Marr in recognition of her contribution in research, writing, and teaching about Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in Canada, her work on the executive of the MHSC, and her role in the founding and ongoing work of the Société d'histoire mennonite du Québec.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada brings together representatives of Mennonite institutions, archives, and provincial historical societies to learn from each other and plan projects together. The Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) and the Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID) are two projects that have come out of MHSC, providing excellent resources dealing with the history of Mennonites in Canada. Upcoming conferences include "Mennonite-Indigenous Encounters in Time and Place" in Waterloo, May 2021,



and “MCC at 100: Mennonites, Service and the Humanitarian Impulse,” to be held in Winnipeg, September 30 to October 2, 2021.

The MHSC annual meeting in January 2020 was hosted by the Société d’histoire mennonite du Québec at Camp Peniel, north of Montreal. The camp in the Laurentians is owned by the Mennonite Brethren churches of Quebec. MHSC members

participated in the “Great Winter Warm-Up,” Mennonite Central Committee’s comforter project, by knotting a prepared comforter.

The new executive of MHSC includes Laureen Harder-Gissing, president; Conrad Stoesz, vice-president; Jeremy Wiebe, treasurer; Barb Draper, secretary; and Bruce Guenther, member-at-large.

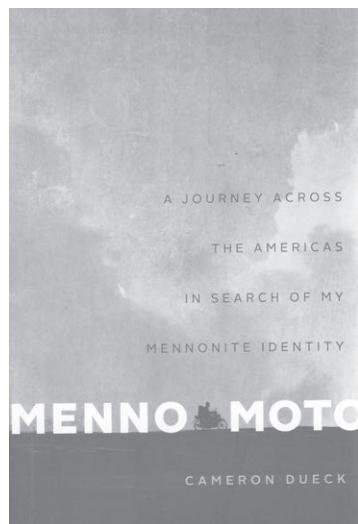


**Laureen Harder-Gissing (right) presents the 2020 award of excellence to Lucille Marr.** Photo credit for both MHSC images: Barb Draper.



**Alain Després, the provincial coordinator of Mennonite Brethren Churches in Québec (left), and Richard Lougheed of the Société d’histoire mennonite du Québec, help knot a comforter for Mennonite Central Committee at the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada meetings held at Camp Peniel in the Laurentians on January 18, 2020.**

## Book Reviews



Cameron Dueck, *Menno Moto: A Journey Across the Americas in Search of My Mennonite Identity* (Windsor, ON: Biblioasis, 2020), 302p.

*Reviewed by Dora Dueck, Delta, BC*

One spring morning in 2012, journalist and travel adventurer Cameron Dueck started up his Kawasaki KLR650 motorcycle at a campsite near the Red River in Manitoba, where his great-grandfather landed in Manitoba in 1874 when emigrating from Russia, and hit the road south in search of other Mennonites.

Eight months later, arriving in Remecó in Patagonia, the most southerly Mennonite colony, Dueck had covered some 45,000 kilometres and visited the diaspora of that 1870s migration to Canada—in Mexico, Belize, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Argentina.

“I knew there were tens of thousands of my people down south,” he writes in *Menno Moto*. “I wanted to go take a look.”

In Mexico, this “look” takes in conflict over water because of extensive Mennonite agricultural development, as well as a scheme for possible emigration back to Russia. He gets to know a man caught up in the drug trade. In Belize, he spends time with two brothers, the one embracing education and assimilation, the other moving on, as Mennonites do so often, seeking separation from *weltmensch* or people of the world.

In Bolivia, among the most socially conservative of Mennonites, Dueck sinks deeply into the “ghost rapes” situation that received worldwide media attention, gathering and puzzling over perspectives from various sides, including convicted perpetrators in prison. The stories

haunt him, become “a sour memory.” In Paraguay, he encounters prosperity underwritten by a script of past hardship in a hostile environment. But the original isolationist intentions seem nowhere in sight. These Mennonites have achieved “more land, more cattle, more wealth,” but are they “any closer to heaven” than those they once left?

Dueck, whose first book *The New Northwest Passage* recounts an expedition by yacht, is a marvellous storyteller. Historical background is accessible, and blessedly accurate as far as I can tell; people and places come to life through colourful details and dialogue; there’s plenty of humour.

The “epic journey” narrated here is much more, however, than a series of interesting vignettes about the identity and adaptations of conservative Mennonite groups who left the Canadian prairies for greater spiritual purity and now lie scattered across the Americas. Dueck probes his own identity, too. He grew up in a Mennonite community, on a farm in the Manitoba Interlake, but moved away geographically and religiously in pursuit of his writing career. Can he still claim the label? Further, what does the label *Mennonite* actually mean?

As insider, Dueck finds access into the communities he visits via the ubiquitous inter-Mennonite network of relations and shared history. He recognizes himself in much of what he sees. As outsider, unbehoden to Mennonite institutions and driven by personal inquiry, he can appreciate and critique without defensiveness; he can express what he experiences as he goes, be it joy, familiarity, loneliness, disgust, connection, or disconnection. It’s a long journey he rides in *Menno Moto*, an engrossing quest, and a pleasure to read.

*Dora Dueck (no relation to Cameron) is the author of four books of fiction, most recently the novel All That Belongs.*

Ralph Friesen, *Dad, God, and Me: Remembering a Mennonite Pastor and His Wayward Son* (Victoria, BC: FriesenPress, 2019), 288p.

Reviewed by Mary Ann Loewen, Winnipeg

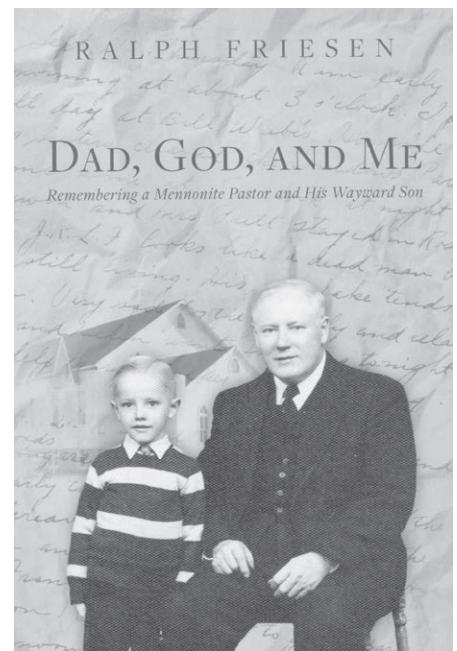
In the introduction to his memoir, Ralph Friesen says that this biography/memoir represents the challenge of “not only

get[ting] to know my father better, but also . . . get[ting] to know myself better” (3). And indeed, Friesen’s story reveals a comprehensive look at his father’s life as well as an examination of how that life has impacted his own. This thorough account makes use of sources from both parents: diaries, postcards, letters, photographs, and sermon notes. The story begins with Friesen’s paternal grandparents and extends well beyond his father’s death, into his own adult life as he grapples with his father’s influence.

There are many fascinating, moving, and sometimes funny stories included in this memoir, and the extensive breadth of research is truly admirable. Yet the ultimate strength of this narrative lies in Friesen’s insistence on honesty in his depiction of events and in his willingness to lay bare his own vulnerability. For example, Friesen quotes boldly from exceedingly romantic letters his father wrote to his mother, and includes jarring testimony from his mother’s diary of how difficult her life was after his father’s stroke (at the young age of 56). And Friesen does not stop at vicarious frankness. He describes his own teenage life this way: “I did not do well in mathematics and chemistry. . . . I suffered from acne. . . . I tried to divert myself from . . . self-condemning thoughts by making smart remarks in class” (243). Later, as a middle-aged man, he admits that he “had not escaped from [his] . . . never ending slow motion wrestling match with my own unfulfilled dream” (264). Indeed, Friesen’s humility and his desire for acceptance and love become the driving force behind this affecting memoir.

For while this narrative is a factual account of a man’s life, it is also the story of a son trying to find an emotionally absent father. Friesen writes, while “there was nothing terribly unusual, when I was young, in having a father who was often absent, or reserved in emotional expression toward his children” (117), yet, “growing up, I missed my father” (137). This longing is felt throughout the account, and is reinforced by the various dreams that are sprinkled in amongst the chronological story.

Friesen’s choice of vocation as a therapist allows him to delve deeply into this relationship. After a particularly troubling time in his life, he ends an imaginary conversation with his father with these words: “I love you, Dad. No



matter what you do, or did. . . . and I am accepting myself, loving myself. Goodbye, Dad. . . . I miss you. I love you” (266). An absolution for his father and for himself, perhaps?

But this book represents much more than a son searching for his father. For the historians, social scientists, religious students, there is much to be gleaned. There are researched accounts of Mennonites settling into Steinbach, of various businesses that were active in the 1950s and ’60s in Steinbach, and of religious movements that affected the Mennonites in the East Reserve. Certainly, the religious aspect of Friesen’s family life is integral to this story. His father was very active in his ministerial and other church-related duties, which he took very seriously, and which often took him away from home. And while there was undoubtedly a connection between the trendy evangelicalism that took many Mennonites by storm in the 1950s and the business ethos of Steinbach Mennonite merchants, Friesen has only good things to say about his parents’ business-minded friends.

Readers with various interests will find this an absorbing read. To me, it was, at its core, at once a brutally honest and compassionate ‘take’ on a father’s life from a questing son’s point of view.

*Mary Ann Loewen is the editor of two recent books on parent-child relationships, Finding Father: Stories from Mennonite Daughters and Sons and Mothers: Stories from Mennonite Men.*