

# Mennonite Historian

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



Pictured above is Helen Martens (1928–2020), playing piano and leading a choir at Conrad Grebel University College (Waterloo, Ontario), ca. 1969. Her story starts on page 5. Photo credit: David Hunsburger, MAID CA MAO Hist.Mss. 10.28-DH-1249.

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# Good Faith, International Law, and the 1873 Privilegium

by Blake Hamm, Selkirk, Manitoba<sup>1</sup>

Between 1874 and 1880, approximately 7,000 Mennonites emigrated from South Russia to Manitoba, Canada, based on guarantees extended to them by the Canadian government. In July 1873, a letter written by John Lowe, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, seemingly gave Mennonites the right to operate private, German-language, religious schools in Canada as they had in Russia. This letter, however, differed from the Order in Council intended to give legal effect to those guarantees.<sup>2</sup> The Order in Council more accurately reflected the Canadian Constitution, which placed education under provincial jurisdiction.

As a result, by 1919, the educational autonomy supposedly promised to Mennonites had been extinguished by provincial legislation mandating public secular schools with instruction in English.<sup>3</sup> Those who refused to comply faced heavy fines, seizure of property, and/or imprisonment, and many emigrated once again—this time to Mexico and Paraguay.

## Migrating to Canada

Mennonites have a history of negotiating special privileges in their place of

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settlement. Initially, these were agreements made with local authorities, wherein their religious practices would be tolerated in exchange for payments and/or making marginal lands productive. Gradually, this extended to negotiating a legal charter, or a *Privilegium*, with the sovereign ruler. Legal rights to separate schools were a part of local agreements dating back to the early 1600s in Poland and incorporated into the *Privilegia* of Augustus II in 1732 and Augustus III in 1750. Beginning in 1789, Mennonites began settling in Russia after negotiating a Petition in 1788 and, later, a Charter of Privileges in 1801. In Russia, Mennonites lived in self-governing colonies and, likewise, established their own system of schools.<sup>4</sup>

In 1871, the Russian government announced reforms that included universal, compulsory military service for men and the transfer of school administration to Russian authorities, with mandated instruction in Russian.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in 1872, Mennonite leaders began inquiring about immigration to North America, specifically mentioning the military and education reforms.

In 1873, delegates travelled to Canada to survey land and negotiate terms of immigration. In Ottawa, four delegates received a letter of guarantees from John Lowe, dated July 23, 1873 (the “Lowe Letter”).<sup>6</sup> Clauses 1 and 10 read [emphasis added]:

1. An entire exemption from military service is *by law and Order in Council granted* to the Denomination of Christians called Mennonites.

10. The fullest privilege of exercising their religious principles is *by law afforded* without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever; and the same privilege extends to the education of their children in schools.<sup>7</sup>

Clause 10 was verbatim and Clause 1 nearly verbatim to the wording in an earlier letter of guarantees written by Lowe before the delegates had left Russia, dated May 3, 1873 (the “May 3 Letter”).

Five days later, on July 28, J. H. Pope, Minister of Agriculture, submitted a memorandum to the Governor General, that, once approved on August 13, 1873, became Order in Council No. 1873-0957 (“Order in Council 957”). Pope changed the wording as per below [emphasis added]:

1st. That an entire exemption from any military service, *as is provided by law and Order in Council*, will be granted to the denomination of Christians called Mennonites.

10th. That the Mennonites will have the fullest privilege of exercising their religious principles, and educating their children in schools, *as provided by law*, without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever.<sup>8</sup>

The slight changes in wording are significant in how the articles would later be interpreted. Article 1 changed from “*by law and Order in Council granted*” to “*as is provided by law and Order in Council*.” Article 10 regarding education, was altered from “*is by law afforded*” to “*as provided by law*.”

From a legal standpoint, Pope’s language in Order in Council 957 was more accurate than Lowe’s, as the *British North America Act* placed education under provincial jurisdiction.<sup>9</sup> Whatever his reason for so doing, Pope revised the wording of the promises that had twice been previously communicated to the Mennonites—first in the May 3 Letter and again in the Lowe Letter. Years later, these revisions would be the source of controversy between the Mennonites and the governments of Canada, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan.

On August 22, 1873, nine days after approving Order in Council 957, Lord Dufferin sent instructions that the Order be “cancelled” until he could send his “further directions.” In a letter to Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, Lord Dufferin stated that these instructions were based on orders from British officials, and that he would need advice from the Colonial Office prior to approving any agreement with the Mennonites.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, Lord Dufferin never sent “further directions,” nor did he formally revoke the Order either. Further, due to British diplomatic concerns with Russia over the activities of Canadian immigration agent William Hespeler, Order in Council 957 was marked “secret,” withdrawn from circulation, and remained unknown to the Mennonites until 1916.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, Mennonites viewed the Lowe Letter, and not Order in Council 957, as their Canadian *Privilegium*. This supposed *Privilegium* was a decisive factor in 7,000 Mennonites deciding to emigrate to the

(cont’d on p. 4)

# Genealogy and Family History

## Genealogy and Memory

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

One of the first activities of a novice genealogist is to tap into the knowledge of older relatives. Soon, however, the genealogist finds out that there are relatives who have never bothered to think about their ancestry beyond their own parents. For example, my own grandmother, who came to Canada in 1907 as a girl, had no memory of her grandparents, had no idea what their names were, and was unconcerned by this lack of knowledge.

On the other hand, there are older relatives who take a keen interest in who their ancestors were and how they are related to the people around them. These people can often tell you about their grandparents, aunts and uncles, or their multitude of cousins. Many names and dates appear to be stored in their memories. In addition, they can relate stories told to them by their own parents and grandparents. The question is: just how accurate is this information? Before addressing this question, I think it is important for genealogists to admit that information their parents or grandparents have told them may simply be wrong.

One of the most frustrating aspects of memory and genealogy is dealing with people who refuse to admit that information provided by their grandmother (or some other, long-gone relative) could possibly be wrong. Some people will not budge, even when presented with rock-solid documentation to the contrary, or when told that something their ancestor supposedly did was simply not physiologically, geographically, or historically possible.

The GRANDMA database contains a large amount of information based only on distant memory. Unfortunately, this is rarely stated in the database and is passed off as “fact.”

Every one of us has false memories of past events or information told to us in the past. People have been studying false memories long before psychology was a profession. These false memories are embedded in our minds, and we are often certain that they are true. Of course, the number of such false memories increase as we become older, experience more, and add more memories. Also, as we

get older, our memories fade; we begin to connect the dots or fill in the missing information with “facts” that are simply not true. With time this becomes part of what we perceive as our true memory. This is called confabulation. What got me thinking seriously about genealogy and false memory was a CBC documentary that appeared last summer on *The Nature of Things*.<sup>1</sup>

Faulty or false memory not only enters genealogical (or historical) sources through oral recounting, but also through documentary evidence. What we consider as reliable documentation may contain errors due to short-term lapses in memory. For example, a church *Ältester* baptizes 14 candidates and then writes their names down in the church register. Due to a lapse in memory, he may record an Agatha as an Anna. I have come across many examples of names and dates incorrectly written down, which are likely due to lapses in short-term memory.

Long-term memory is an even bigger problem. A good set of documented examples of people incorrectly recalling an event in their own lives can be found in the Canadian and U.S. censuses where immigration years are provided. There are many examples of the same individual giving different immigration years in different census years. In one census, the person reports that they came to Canada in 1876 and, 10 years later, in the next census, the same person reports immigrating in 1878. Ship passenger lists are real-time records of immigration, and census immigration years, which rely on memory, may not agree.

Another commonly used genealogical source that is subject to faulty memory is the obituary. These rely on the memories of a surviving family member who writes the obituary. Birth locations found in obituaries should always be suspect. Another important genealogical record where information is supplied by a surviving family member is the civil death record. A good example is the death certificate of my own great-great-grandmother. In this case, the informant, her eldest son, who never knew his own grandparents, provided an incorrect birth location as well as the wrong name for her father. A surviving child often struggles to recall where their parent was

born, the year of birth, and names of their parents' own parents.

A fourth example of this is the set of so-called EWZ records.<sup>2</sup> When the German army retreated from Ukraine in 1943, they were accompanied by thousands of Mennonites seeking to escape the advancing Russian army. Once in German territory, these refugees filled in forms and ancestry charts (*Ahnentafeln*). These *Ahnentafeln* were constructed from memory and whatever documentation the refugees were able to bring along. As a result, the information on the earlier generations found in an *Ahnentafel* is questionable, and occasionally does not agree with other, more reliable, sources. Sometimes two *Ahnentafeln* from related people do not agree.

So, just how reliable is orally transmitted, memory-based information? Unfortunately, something like this is impossible to quantify. We all must make our own judgement calls. Asking an experienced genealogist may help. Just remember, that the genealogist is also making their own judgement calls, and every genealogist has different criteria. However, an experienced genealogist may be able to spot things that you might never have noticed.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself when evaluating genealogical information provided orally: 1) How reliable is the memory of the person? 2) If the information was recorded, when? 3) How consistent is this information with other sources, in particular, with reliable sources? 4) How internally consistent is the information?

Question 4 regarding internal consistency can be broken down further. For example, be aware of suspicious (4a) historical claims—an immigration into Russia during the years 1798–1802 or 1809–1815 is rather rare, and no Mennonites arrived in Russia before 1787. Then there are (4b) questionable geographical assertions—remember Low-German Mennonites lived in a rather small geographical region before the 1790s. Finally, does any feature of the story sound physically (4c) impossible (such as an ancestor who single-handedly held back a team of horses) or (4d) unlikely (when average life expectancy was below 60 years, it is highly unlikely that a man would live to be 102!) or (4e) simply hard to believe (such as meeting the Czar while immigrating into Russia).

(cont'd on p. 11)

## The 1873 *Privilegium*

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Canadian North-West in the years 1874–1880, rather than remain in Russia or settle on more fertile land in the United States.<sup>12</sup> As for Canada, government officials likewise believed the Lowe Letter to be an “act” of the government that “pledged” and “contracted” to Mennonites “the privilege of religious schools of their own.”<sup>13</sup>

### *The Mennonite Public Schools Crisis*

Upon immigrating to Canada, Mennonites had control over their own schools, but gradually the state sought more control over education. Between 1916 and 1918, Manitoba and Saskatchewan made English the sole language of instruction and introduced compulsory attendance at government-approved schools for children, under threat of fines and imprisonment for the parents.<sup>14</sup> When some Mennonite groups resisted and boycotted the public schools, they faced heavy and sustained prosecution. Numerous petitions and delegations sent to negotiate with the Dominion, Manitoban, and Saskatchewan governments yielded no resolution or reprieve, despite widespread knowledge of the Lowe Letter.<sup>15</sup>

One instance of prosecution reached the Manitoba Court of Appeal. However, the Court ruled that the Government of Manitoba did have the “power to legislate as to schools, school attendance or education in so far as the accused or any Mennonite coming from . . . Russia . . . was concerned.” The ruling gave precedence to Order in Council 957, as education was a matter of provincial jurisdiction.<sup>16</sup> Mennonites unsuccessfully appealed the case all the way to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, prosecutions continued. In 1921, one trial in Hague, Saskatchewan, saw 60 Mennonites fined and one imprisoned for 30 days.<sup>18</sup> Between 1920 and 1921, 11 districts in Saskatchewan paid a combined total of over \$26,000 in fines and court fees, at a time when \$5,000 was enough to build and furnish a one-room schoolhouse with a teacher’s residence. If Mennonites could not pay the fines, government officials seized food and livestock and sold them at public auction.<sup>19</sup> In Saskatchewan, approximately 5,500 prosecutions were launched against Mennonites from 1918–1925.<sup>20</sup>

With neither Dominion nor provincial

governments intervening, the judicial appeal route exhausted, and the economic penalties harsh, Mennonites who rejected the new schools had few options. For many, emigration again provided the solution. Between 1922 and 1930, approximately 8,000 Mennonites left Manitoba and Saskatchewan and emigrated to Mexico and Paraguay, where they once again secured *Privilegia* allowing them to continue operating private, religious, German-language schools.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Lowe Letter in International Law*

Though the Lowe Letter has been analyzed through domestic law, it has not been considered from the perspective of international law. This article takes the position that the Lowe Letter did have status in international law, and that Canada had legal obligations to act in good faith toward those Mennonites and their descendants who settled in Canada under the terms of the Lowe Letter.

Unilateral declarations—whereby one state makes a promise—formed a part of international law in the late 19th century. The Lowe Letter fulfilled all the criteria of being a unilateral declaration. An example of a unilateral declaration made in 1886 required an express promise by one party with acceptance by the other, and a concurrence of wills of essential elements.<sup>22</sup> The Lowe Letter satisfied all three criteria: the express promises by the government came in written form; the Mennonites accepted and acted upon these promises by their emigration to Canada; and the concurrence of wills is demonstrated by the fact that Mennonites based their emigration to Canada on the Lowe Letter and that the Canadian government believed, too, that the Lowe Letter was an “act” of the government.<sup>23</sup>

The Lowe Letter also met the criteria of the later *Nuclear Tests Case*<sup>24</sup> in that Canada intended to be bound by the terms of the Lowe Letter and was, therefore, required to conduct itself in a manner consistent with the letter. Canada’s undertaking was public, as the Lowe Letter was given to the Mennonites and considered to be a decisive factor by those who immigrated to Canada.

Even if the Mennonites did not have capacity to be a party to a treaty, they could still be the recipient of a unilateral declaration, as a unilateral declaration may be made to “other entities.”<sup>25</sup> The negotiations also had sufficient international

character. The tension between Britain and Russia had the potential to transform an international relationship. The history, organization, and complexity behind the negotiations all lend credence to the Mennonite delegation being an “entity” within international law. Finally, while the law of self-determination largely developed after the First World War, rights and privileges for minorities had long been the subject of international law, including at the 1878 Congress of Berlin.<sup>26</sup>

### *Did Canada act in Good Faith?*

Good faith and *pacta sunt servanda*—the idea that agreements must be kept—are standards that apply to unilateral declarations.<sup>27</sup> Good faith requires that a unilateral declaration may not be revoked arbitrarily, which in turn takes into account any fundamental change of circumstance.<sup>28</sup>

Adolf Ens has persuasively argued against a wider “conspiracy theory” of the government actively concealing Order in Council 957, asserting that the Canadian government acted in good faith in 1873.<sup>29</sup> However, that the government acted in good faith after 1916 is less convincing. That Pope failed to provide Mennonites with a copy of Order in Council 957 in 1873 amounts to a significant mistake, even if an innocent one. As a result, immigration ensued based on the Lowe Letter, which was a unilateral act of international law.

This means that the later 1916 re-circulation of Order in Council 957 amounted to a revocation of the Lowe Letter and, therefore, was a breach of international law. Internal domestic law does not absolve the Dominion government from obligations arising from international law. In other words, the fact that education falls under provincial jurisdiction and that subsequent judicial rulings later changed legal interpretations does not provide a valid legal justification for Canada’s revoking the promises made to the Mennonites.<sup>30</sup>

Whether changing notions of education in the 20th century qualified as a “fundamental change of circumstance” cannot be determined definitively. In the present, Mexico continues to allow Old Colony Mennonites to operate the same private religious schools that remain “remarkably unchanged.”<sup>31</sup> Yet, even if such a “fundamental change” did occur, the Lowe Letter was still revoked arbitrarily.

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## In Memoriam: Helen Martens (1928–2020)

by Peter Letkemann, Winnipeg

*I have dedicated my life to music, and my journey has taken me all over the world. I look back on my life with gratitude as I recall the many unique and enriching experiences that I was granted.* –Helen Martens<sup>1</sup>

Helen Martens was born in the village of Tiede, Zagradowka Colony (Nr. 8), on 21 February 1928. Her parents were Jacob Johann Martens (1899–1987) and Anna Peter Dyck (1898–1989), who had been married in Tiede on 3 July 1922. In the years from 1923 to 1928, Jacob and Anna were blessed with four children: Johann, Wilhelm, Susanna, and Helene (Lena).<sup>2</sup>

Early in November 1929, as most Soviet citizens were anticipating celebrations for the 12th anniversary of the October Revolution, Jacob Martens and his wife made the fateful decision to travel to Moscow in hopes of joining the thousands of other Mennonites (and other Soviet-German Lutherans and Catholics) attempting to escape the “Red Paradise” to Germany and the Americas.

On 3 November, they left Tiede by train and probably arrived in Moscow by 6 November. In Moscow, Soviet authorities had already begun arresting many refugees and deporting them eastward to the GULag camps. But in an attempt to deflect international criticism and garner some good publicity, authorities agreed to have officials in the German embassy office, together with Mennonite and other religious leaders, prepare lists of 15 prospective refugee groups—totalling some 5,000+ persons. The first six groups left by train for Latvia on 29 November. The Martens family was registered in the 15th group, and, together with members of the 14th group, they left Moscow on 9 December. The 682 persons in these two groups crossed through “The Red Gate” into Latvia the following day.<sup>3</sup>

The train journey continued through Latvia into West Prussia and on to the former military camp of Hammerstein, where they were housed for several months in the *Offiziersbarake* 3.<sup>4</sup> In the spring, they were transferred to the transit camp in Mölln, waiting for a transport to Canada. They finally left on 11 June 1930 via Hamburg for Southampton. Here, they

boarded the CPR Steamship *S.S. Montclare* on 13 June and landed in Quebec City on 21 June 1930.<sup>5</sup>

The Martens family arrived in Manitoba just as the depression was beginning and spent several difficult years living with various farm families in Oak Bluff, Springstein, and Sanford. The family eventually settled on their own farmstead in Sanford in 1934, where Jacob became a successful farmer.

Helen attended local schools for 10 years and enrolled at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna to complete the last two years of her high school education.

In Gretna, George Wiebe remembers her as a very beautiful, outgoing young woman who knew what she wanted and worked hard to get it.<sup>6</sup> Music had been an important part of Helen’s life from a young age, but she was largely self-taught. By age 12, she was playing in church (Springstein Mennonite Church), accompanying the congregation while her father served as *Vorsänger* (song leader) for many years. It was in Gretna that Helen began her formal piano training.

After completing Grade 12 in 1946, Helen taught for a short time in a small country school north west of Winnipeg. Her brother, Peter, recalled that it was not a pleasant experience for her. In the fall, she moved to Winnipeg and attended Wesley College (now University of Winnipeg) for two years, together with her younger sister Anna (Braun).<sup>7</sup> In Winnipeg, she studied piano with Leonard Heaton. Not having a good grand piano of her own, she practiced on the piano in the first building of the Canadian Mennonite Bible College, sharing available practice times with Esther Wiebe in 1947.<sup>8</sup> She achieved her LRSM (Licentiate of the Royal Schools of Music in England) in 1952.<sup>9</sup>

About 1949, she enrolled at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas, but, after one year, she moved on to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, where she completed her BA in 1954. She taught from 1954–1956 at Hugh J. Macdonald High School in Winnipeg while completing her MA at the University of Minnesota in 1956.



**Helen Martens on the movie set with Leonard Nimoy, 1994. She was a consultant and helped with the soundtrack.**

Helen went on to teach piano at Bluffton College in Ohio from 1959–1962 and then began graduate studies at Columbia University in New York in the fall of 1962. Among her teachers were the visiting German Professor, Walter Wiora, and the famed musicologist, Paul Henry Lang. For her doctoral dissertation, she chose the hymnody of the Hutterites. She would have known Hutterite communities in southern Manitoba and been aware of their unique singing tradition.

After completing her course work at Columbia in 1965, Helen was invited by college president Winfield Fretz to join the faculty at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo. She taught courses in music and the fine arts, as well as music and literature, became director of the college choir, and began piano instruction while also teaching music history and music appreciation.

Former colleague Walter Klaassen recalled, “A music appointment was made because music, especially vocal, was such an important part of Mennonite worship and community life. Helen added a new and vital dimension to the College, chapel, and academic program... She was strong and upright and self-assured... She was [also] a lonely person, but determined and assertive.” Other Grebel colleagues remember her as a kind and generous person with uncompromising standards. All were unanimous in recalling her vibrant soprano voice cutting through the sea of mostly

*(cont'd on p. 9)*

# Mennonite Heritage Archives

## The Move to Mexico and Paraguay: A Call for Materials

The Mennonite Heritage Archives (MHA) is working with the Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV) in Steinbach, the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, and the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada in preparation for the commemoration of the movement of Mennonites from Canada to Mexico and Latin America in the 1920s. But we are looking for your help!

MHA is looking for archival materials that tell this story, including oral interviews, photos, correspondence, diaries, and journals. MHV is looking for artifacts, which could include clothing, items relating to farm and home life, travel items, toys, or any other item with a story to tell that relates to the emigration of Mennonites from Canada to Latin America.

In the context of the First World War, the provincial governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan wanted more compliant citizens. Officials believed they could instill more British values through the school system and, therefore, legislated that all children must attend government-run schools.

Some Mennonite groups complied with the new legislation, believing they could instill their values in other ways. However, other Mennonite groups resisted, believing education was the responsibility of the church and home, not the government. They pointed to the federal government's 1873 letter of invitation explicitly offering freedom of religion and education.

The provincial governments also expropriated land for the new schools. If parents did not send their children to the government school, they were fined, imprisoned, and had their farm implements, livestock, and even food confiscated.

Between 1918 and 1925, there were over 5,500 prosecutions in Saskatchewan alone. In Manitoba, between 1917 and 1921, there were over \$3,600 of fines collected from parents charged with not sending their children to the government-run schools. While the details of the larger story are documented, we lack individual stories revealing the struggle parents had in the education question, the impact of the fines on the family, the experience of having machinery or livestock confiscated. What was it like packing up the house and selling much of the household goods? Was the trip to Mexico exciting? What were the first months like in Mexico? These and other questions are being asked ahead of the 100th anniversary of this momentous migration.

About 7,000 Mennonites left Canada in the 1920s, believing Canada had broken its promise (see the lead article in this issue of the *Mennonite Historian*). It was one of the largest movements out of the country since Canada's confederation in 1867. These events have made an indelible mark on those who left, those who stayed, and on the countries they call home.

Some Mennonites who moved south were in dire straits because of the fines and travel costs. Even if they wanted to return to Canada, many did not have the means. Getting established in Mexico and Paraguay was difficult.

The move to Paraguay in 1926 saw 9.5% of the immigrants die by the end of 1928. But with hard work, ingenuity, and support from within the community, the Mennonites were able to thrive. Today they are major economic players within their countries. But the scars of the government schools issue have left some with a long-standing suspicion of higher education.

The move to Mexico and Paraguay also changed the identity of the Mennonites who stayed in Canada. It is common for people to talk about "conservatives" and "liberals"; other rubrics use the terms "tradition-minded" and "assimilation-minded" as opposite ends of the continuum. The groups that left were the more tradition-minded, and they were in the majority in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Their views and values were the norm.

Not only did the more tradition-minded leave in the move to Mexico and Paraguay, their farms were taken up by some of the 20,000 Mennonites escaping hardship in Russia between 1923–1930. These new immigrants were related to those in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mexico, and Paraguay, but 50 years of separation had resulted in many differences between the newly arrived *Russländer* and the original *Kanadier*, who had started from scratch on the prairie in the 1870s.

Many who emigrated maintained ties with Canada, and in some cases citizenship, so that some of their children and grandchildren have returned to Canada.

This story has themes related to justice, immigration, education, and multiculturalism. If you have materials that could help tell this story, please be in touch with Conrad Stoesz at the Mennonite Heritage Archives (cstoesz@mharchives.ca) or Andrea Klassen at the Mennonite Heritage Village (andreak@mhv.ca).



Three women at the Altona train station saying good bye to friends, ca. 1926. Far left is Helen Stoesz (1877–1968). Photo credit: MAID CA MHC PP-22 - Photo Col. 639-20.0.

## The Heartbeat of Home: The Hidden Life of Mennonite Clocks

by Rosmarin Heidenreich, Winnipeg

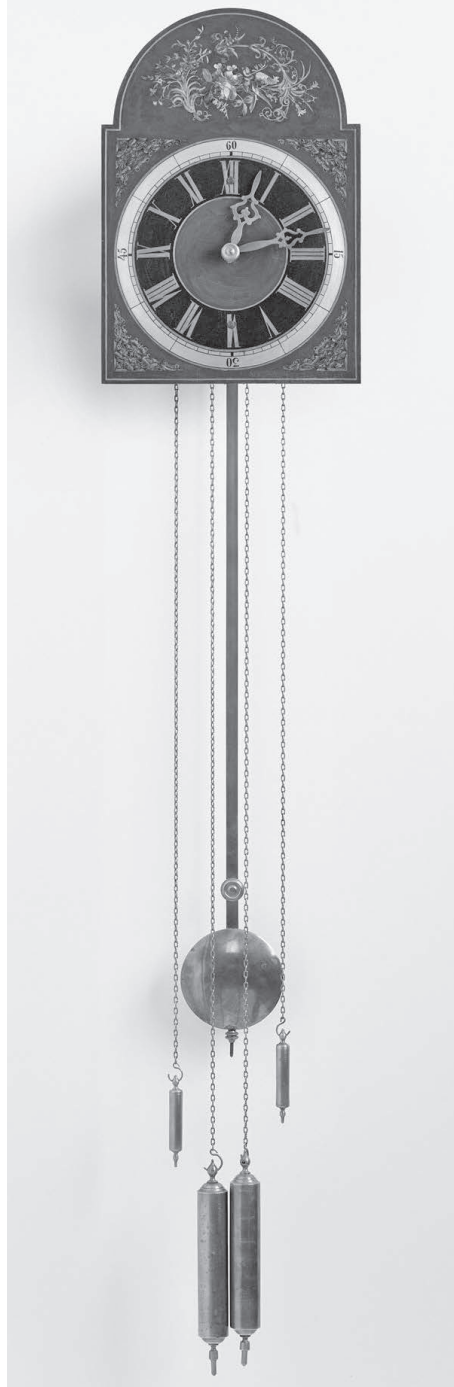
When he was thirteen, Neil Neumann and his family were forced to flee their home village of Einlage in southern Russia, seeking to escape the brutal Soviet regime by following the German army as it retreated from the area in 1943. His father had been exiled to a gulag in the 1930s, and Neil, his mother, grandmother, and two siblings became part of the massive Mennonite trek that made its way westward by way of horse-drawn wagons, railway freight cars, and on foot. They took only the most essential items with them.

On the perilous journey, Neil was entrusted with an important task: to carry and keep safe the family's Kroeger clock. This wall clock, with its large metal face plate and mechanism, pendulum, brass chains, and weights, was heavy and unwieldy, even when taken apart to be carried as a bundle. Although most of the possessions the family had taken with them were lost or had to be left behind along the way, young Neil managed to hang on to the clock, which he faithfully carried through half of Ukraine all the way to Poland and thence to Germany. When the family was finally able to emigrate to Canada, the grandmother insisted that the clock be taken along.

Kroeger clocks figure in many stories of Mennonite dislocation. Abram Reimer was only seven when he was charged with carrying his family's clock. The Reimers, following much the same trajectory as the Neumanns, were obliged to travel mainly on foot, through rain, snow, sleet, and winter storms. The Reimer clock travelled even further than the Neumann's, arriving in Canada only after a ten-year sojourn in South America.

In passing on these stories, Arthur Kroeger, a descendant of the Kroeger clockmakers who had settled in Winnipeg, observed: "The clock was so highly cherished by the original owners that it simply could not be left behind, regardless of what was happening to them in times of war or peace."

What made these clocks so important to the owners that they hung onto them on unimaginably long and dangerous journeys, during which every non-essential item was a hindrance and an encumbrance?



**Kroeger Clock no. 3206, ca. 1900, nicknamed the "Neumann Clock."** Courtesy of Kroeger Clocks Heritage Foundation. Photo credit: Anikó Szabó.

One explanation is that many clocks had family stories attached to them, even before the perilous odysseys on which they accompanied their owners. Some had been inherited from their families; some had been received on occasions such as weddings or the birth of a first child. Others had been commissioned to mark the acquisition of a new home. A further reason may be that the clocks marked the daily rhythm of the household and were

## Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies



associated with the normalcy of everyday life. With their constant ticking and the resonant bell sounding the hours, they were the heartbeat of home.

But there were less tangible factors, too, that determined the attachment to the clock, arguably more powerful ones. Practical as they were, Mennonites usually possessed few material objects of symbolic value, artifacts that meaningfully connected them with their past. Their Kroeger clocks, proudly displayed objects of value, attested to their owners' hard-earned prosperity, the fruit of their diligence and thrift. The ornamentations on the clocks depicted the flowers and bucolic scenes found in the landscapes that surrounded their villages. The Kroeger clocks were a representation of their lives as they had been lived in their peaceful villages in Russia. Associated as they were with their own stories and those of the families to whom they belonged, they seem to have become a kind of extension of the identities of their owners, a reminder of how they had lived and who they had been before the cataclysmic events in which they had been caught up.

In an illustrated, visually stunning volume on Kroeger clocks, Arthur Kroeger provided a wealth of information about Mennonite clocks that were manufactured from the late 18th century until the 1920s, first in the Danzig (Gdansk) area of West Prussia, now Poland, and then in southern Russia, now Ukraine. Kroeger offers readers not only substantial information about these clocks, gathered over a lifetime of working with them, but also a treasure trove of stories about the clocks and their owners. Many of these clock stories, which make up almost half the book, not only trace the origins and provenance of the clocks, but also recount the turbulent lives of many of their owners. These clock narratives constitute an important contribution to the social and cultural history of the Russian Mennonites from the early 1800s to the present.

After Arthur Kroeger died in 2015, his daughter Liza sought to create a vehicle

*(cont'd on p. 10)*

## The 1873 *Privilegium*

(cont'd from p. 4)

An arbitrary revocation is dependent on whether the “addressees have relied on it in good faith and have accordingly been led ‘detrimentally to change position or suffer some prejudice,’”<sup>32</sup> which is certainly the case for the Mennonites, who had relied on the Lowe Letter in immigrating, and later suffered as a result of the severe school prosecutions.

Applying the standard of good faith means Mennonites should have received some degree of accommodation. The provinces could have exempted the Mennonites from the schooling legislation or, more realistically, granted a phase-in period or a temporary amnesty from the prosecutions and allowed the Mennonites time to either adjust or emigrate. The Dominion government had options, too, and could have invoked section 90 of the *British North America Act* to disallow provincial legislation.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, Canada neither allowed the Mennonites to continue to operate their private religious schools in the 1920s as did Mexico and Paraguay, nor did Canada grant a transition period to allow for emigration as Russia had in the 1870s.

Even if the Lowe Letter has no standing in international law, the lack of good faith on the part of Canada still holds. Contemporary documents demonstrate that the Canadian government believed the Lowe Letter was a binding act of government. Even if the change in wording of Order in Council 957 was made without malintent, the Dominion and provincial governments showed a lack of good faith by failing to accommodate after 1916.

The most culpable people in this affair were probably J. H. Pope and John Lowe. It was under Pope’s instructions that John Lowe wrote the May 3 Letter and then the Lowe Letter, each containing the education clause, repeated verbatim. If the language contained therein was legally inaccurate and in need of revision, it could have been redrafted between May 3 and July 23. Instead, five days later, on July 28, Pope evidently found it necessary to change the wording when drafting Order in Council 957; but he did not, or could not, communicate those changes to the delegates.

Pope and Lowe’s imprecise language is even less defensible when compared to

their American contemporary, Secretary of State Hamilton Fish. Fish had recognized that education also fell outside federal jurisdiction in the United States, and thus the American federal government could not extend any such legal guarantee.<sup>34</sup> The end result of the rash actions of Lowe and Pope—both in respect to their British superiors and in comparison to their American counterparts—was the hastily written, legally inaccurate language in the May 3 Letter and the Lowe Letter, that, once corrected in Order in Council 957, needed to be marked “secret” for British diplomatic considerations.

The role of Lord Dufferin should not be overlooked either. His belated instructions to cancel Order in Council 957 and not to act on it until receiving “further directions” caused the Order to be suspended and withdrawn from circulation. Lord Dufferin did not follow the proper procedure to rescind Order in Council 957, nor did he ever send “further directions” on the matter. This caused both government departments and the Mennonites to believe that the Lowe Letter was an “act” of the government that had “pledged” and “contracted” the “privilege of religious schools.” The fact that the Mennonite immigration continued to be an issue of domestic concern over the remainder of Lord Dufferin’s term as Governor General renders inexplicable, or at least inexcusable, his failure to send his “further directions” on the matter.

### *A Formal Acknowledgment as Remedy*<sup>35</sup>

Given that the Dominion, Manitoban, and Saskatchewan governments violated the principle of good faith and the obligations they owed to Mennonite settlers under international law, it would be appropriate to consider some form of redress or remedy.

At a minimum, it would be appropriate for the Canadian government to formally acknowledge its error in not disclosing Order in Council 957 and to recognize the hardship suffered by Mennonites as a result. Similarly, the Manitoban and Saskatchewan governments should acknowledge the excessive prosecutions that occurred under a climate of intolerance. Further, legislative amendments to the Citizenship Act should be enacted to remedy arcane provisions that disproportionately impact Mennonites, and funding for alternative education programs should be committed to by various levels of government.<sup>36</sup>

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## Endnotes

1. This is a condensed version of the author’s previously published article, “Revisiting the Canadian *Privilegium*: The Lowe Letter, Good Faith, and International Law,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* [MQR] 94 (July 2020): 307–345. Readers will find greater detail and a more robust analysis there. The author wishes to thank William Janzen for his assistance.

2. William Janzen, *Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor Communities in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), chap. 5; Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens? The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870–1925* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1994); Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920–1940: A People’s Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1992), chap. 3; and E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona: D. W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955).

3. Ernest N. Braun, “Why Emigrate?” *Preservings* 34 (Winnipeg: D. F. Plett Foundation, 2014): 4, 8.

4. Peter Braun, “The Educational System of the Mennonite Colonies in South Russia,” trans. Amy E. Enss, *MQR* 3 (Jan. 1929): 169–170; David G. Rempel, “The Mennonite Colonies in Russia: A Study of their Settlement and Economic Development from 1789 to 1914” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1933), 113–119, 299–303; and David G. Rempel, “The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: A Sketch of Its Founding and Endurance, 1789–1919 (Concluded),” *MQR* 48 (Jan. 1974): 40–41.

5. Braun, “Why Emigrate?” 5–6; and James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe - Russia - Canada, 1525 to 1980* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 100–103.

6. Mennonite Heritage Archives, Chortitzer Mennonite Conference fonds, Volume 1417, File 16; see also a reproduction of the English version at Library and Archives Canada, Immigration Branch, RG 76, Volume 173, File 58764, Part 1.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Emphasis added. Aug. 13, 1873, Order in Council PC 1873-0957, RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-1-a.

9. The *British North America Act*, now known as *The Constitution Act*, 1867 (UK), 30 & 31 Vict, c 3, reprinted in RSC 1985, Appendix II, No 5, Section 93.

10. Library and Archives Canada, Sir John A. Macdonald Papers, MG 26A, Volume 79, 30931-30934.

11. For more on Hespeler’s activities in Russia, see Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?*, 12–21; also James Urry, “A Matter of Diplomacy: The British Government and the Mennonite Immigration from Russia to Manitoba, 1872–1875,” *MQR* 87 (April 2013): 225–249.

12. See for example Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?*, 20–21; Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 192; and Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786–1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974), 195; for further analysis see Hamm, “Revisiting the Canadian *Privilegium*,” 319–324.

13. Memorandum, Department of Agriculture, Aug. 3, 1877, and John Lowe to A. M. Burgess, secretary, Department of the Interior, Sept. 28, 1882, quoted in Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?*, 19; and *Report of the Minister of Agriculture of the Dominion of Canada, for the Calendar Year 1873*, Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada, 1874, Volume 6, xiii.



14. *The School Attendance Act*, being Chapter 97 of the Acts of the Legislature of the Province of Manitoba, 1916, Volume I—Public Acts (1916), 329–336; and *The School Attendance Act*, being Chapter 19 of Statutes of the Province of Saskatchewan, 1917, 234–239.

15. Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?*, 116–150; and Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 88–115.

16. *Rex v. Hildebrand*; *Rex v. Doerksen*, 31 C.C.C., 419–425. There remains a constitutional exception to override provincial jurisdiction—the power of “disallowance,” which is discussed below.

17. “Appeal of Mennonites is Finally Dismissed,” *Winnipeg Free Press* (July 31, 1920), 16; and “Mennonites of Manitoba Lose Court Appeal,” *Winnipeg Evening Tribune* (July 30, 1920), 1. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the United Kingdom was at that time Canada’s highest court of law.

18. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920–1940*, 103.

19. Janzen, *Limits on Liberty*, 107; and Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?*, 147.

20. Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?*, 152, Table 14.

21. For the breakdown of Mennonite emigrants, see Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 192; and for the *Privilegia*, see Appendices 8 and 9 in Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?*, 248–251.

22. *Arbitration between Germany and the United Kingdom relating to Lamu Island* (Decision of Aug. 17, 1889), Reports of International Arbitral Awards Volume XXVIII, 239.

23. Memorandum, Department of Agriculture, Aug. 3, 1877, and John Lowe to A. M. Burgess, secretary, Department of the Interior, Sept. 28, 1882, quoted in Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?*, 19; and *Report of the Minister of Agriculture of the Dominion of Canada, for the Calendar Year 1873*, xiii.

24. *Nuclear Tests Case (Australia v. France)*, Judgement, ICJ Reports 1974, 267. Though the Nuclear Tests Case followed a century later, it is viewed as persuasive and the definitive international jurisprudence on unilateral declarations.

25. “Guiding Principles Applicable to Unilateral Declarations” in Report of ILC, 368.

26. Jennifer Jackson Preece, *National Minorities and the European Nation-States System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 62–63.

27. *Nuclear Tests Case*, 267. “Guiding Principles Applicable to Unilateral Declarations” in Report of ILC, 368.

28. “Guiding Principles Applicable to Unilateral Declarations” in Report of ILC, 369, 380–381; and Przemyslaw Saganek, *Unilateral Acts of States in Public International Law* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 4. For fundamental change in circumstance, see Article 62 of *Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties*, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1155, 347.

29. Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?*, 142–143.

30. Article 27 of the Vienna Convention, 339.

31. Robyn Sneath, “‘De jeleada, de vekjeada’: Transnationalism, History, and the Schooling of Low German Mennonites of Canada and Mexico” (PhD diss., Department of Education, University of Oxford, 2018), 31–32.

32. “Guiding Principles Applicable to Unilateral Declarations” in Report of ILC, 380–381.

33. *The British North America Act*, now known as *The Constitution Act, 1867* (UK), 30 & 31 Vict, c 3, reprinted in RSC 1985, Appendix II, No 5, Section 90.

34. Hamilton Fish to M. L. Hiller, Sept. 5, 1873, in Ernest H. Correll, ed., “President Grant and the Mennonite Immigration from Russia,” *MQR* 9 (Jan. 1935): 146–149.

35. For further discussion on a remedy, see Hamm, “Revisiting the Canadian *Privilegium*,” 343–345.

36. For examples, see Bill Janzen, “Lost Canadians: Two Small Categories in Need of Better Remedies,” Brief submitted to House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

for Bill C-6, *An Act to amend the Citizenship Act and to make consequential amendments to another Act*, 42nd Parliament, 1st Session, available online: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/42/1/CIMM/Brief/BR8170471/br-external/JanzenBill-e.pdf>; and Avril Saunders-Currie, “Alternative Education for Low German Mennonite Students: A Negotiation of Education for Equity and Inclusion” (PhD diss., Graduate Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education, University of Toronto, 2017).

## Helen Martens (1928–2020)

(cont’d from p. 5)

male voices in College council meetings, her raucous and infectious laughter, and her warm-hearted encouragement to all those who sought her counsel.<sup>10</sup>

During the summer months, she visited four Hutterite communities in western Canada to interview song leaders and collect melodies. She completed her dissertation in 1968 and became the first Mennonite woman to be awarded a PhD.<sup>11</sup>

It was her study of the Hutterites that brought Helen to the attention of well-known Hollywood actor and director Leonard Nimoy (“Spock” from *Star Trek*). He enlisted Helen for five weeks as a cultural consultant on the set of his 1994 movie, *Holy Matrimony*. She advised Nimoy on Hutterite theology and customs, and she assisted in choosing music for the soundtrack.

“It was the most gratifying, frustrating, interesting, boring, and remarkable professional experience I’ve ever had.”<sup>12</sup>

Helen was also the founder and conductor of the Inter-Mennonite Children’s Choir, which began its first season in the fall of 1967. The choir brought children, ages 7 to 16, from various Mennonite and non-Mennonite churches in the broader community to learn to sing the best sacred music. The choir hosted live performances at the college as well as churches and venues around Kitchener/Waterloo. The choir also undertook international tours to Europe and the United States, and, in 1978, the IMCC won top prize in the CBC/Canada Council National Radio Competition for Amateur Choirs.<sup>13</sup>

Helen was a passionate researcher. During a sabbatical in England in 1980, she began reading letters by and about Felix Mendelssohn. She made numerous research trips to England and Europe to uncover more letters and eventually translated over 9,000 letters. She chose her work on Mendelssohn as the topic for the annual Benjamin Eby Lectures at Conrad Grebel on 26 February 1989. Her lecture was

entitled “Mendelssohn’s Faith and Works: The Spiritual Odyssey of a Composer.”

After her retirement in the summer of 1993, Helen moved to Winnipeg to be closer to her family. She lived first at Lindenwood Terrace and continued her research and writing on Mendelssohn. She eventually published *Felix Mendelssohn: Out of the Depths of his Heart* in 2009 and *Passion vs Duty: Felix Mendelssohn, Cecile, Jenny Lind and E.J.* in 2012.<sup>14</sup>

When her health condition deteriorated, she moved into Pembina Place. She passed away peacefully of heart disease on 9 April 2020 at the age of 92. She spent her last hours listening to sacred music in the presence of family.<sup>15</sup>

*Peter Letkemann is an organist and historian living in Winnipeg. He is currently writing Mennonite Refugees and Refugee Camps in Germany, 1918–1951, set for publication next year as part of the MCC Centennial Commemoration.*

## Endnotes

1. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190503053448/http://helenmartens.ca/>.

2. Information found in CMBoc, #5682 and in GRANDMA, #267494. Two more children were born in Canada, Peter and Anna. See also Jacob J. Martens fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives, volume 1680.

3. Details of their trip are not available, but they may be very similar to those of the Franz Bergen family (CMBoc, #5420), who left Tiege on 8 November. Their journey is documented in the memoirs of Peter Franz Bergen and in the film *Through the Red Gate*.

4. Names of refugee families are found in “Emigrantenliste Hammerstein,” *Der Bote*, 9 April 1930, 5.

5. Information taken from the Martens family registration card in CMBoc, #5682; and Helena Martens in the Hamburg Passenger Lists, 1850–1934, <https://www.germanroots.com/hamburg.html>, accessed on 20 June 2020.

6. George Wiebe, interview, 20 June 2020.

7. Peter Martens, interview, 1 October 2020.

8. Esther Wiebe, interview, 20 June 2020.

9. “Helen Martens,” *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, 599; available online at <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/helen-martens-emc>.

10. Walter Klassen, email of June 2020. Further impressions of Helen by former music colleagues Leonard Enns, Carol Ann Weaver, and Laura Gray can be found in “Grebel’s First Music Professor Left Lasting Legacy,” 15 April 2020, <https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/news/grebel-first-music-professor-left-lasting-legacy>.

11. Mary Oyer, Goshen College, was the second Mennonite woman, 1969. Martens published numerous articles on Hutterite songs, and her dissertation was finally published in book form in 2002.

12. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190503053448/http://helenmartens.ca/>.

13. “Helen Martens,” *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, 599.

14. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190503053448/http://helenmartens.ca/>.

15. Her obituary can be found at [https://passages.winnipegfreepress.com/passages-details/id-272185/helen\\_martens](https://passages.winnipegfreepress.com/passages-details/id-272185/helen_martens).

## Mennonite Clocks

*cont'd from p. 7*

through which the growing accumulation of data on all Mennonite clocks—including those made by the Mandtler, Hildebrandt, Lepp, and Hamm families—could be documented and expanded in a way that would actually involve stakeholders: clock owners, museum curators, horologists, and the general public. The result was the founding of the Winnipeg-based Kroeger Clock Heritage Foundation (KCHF), a non-profit organization generally recognized to be the ultimate authority and research resource for Mennonite clocks.

Under Liza Kroeger's dynamic leadership, with the participation of clock owners, museum experts, and interested members of the community, the KCHF was able to create an interactive web site, the Virtual Museum of Mennonite Clocks [<https://www.kroegerclocks.com>], featuring a high-quality photographic gallery of individual clocks and detailed commentary on each of them. The site also provides an overview of the history of Mennonite clock-making, showing how it evolved with successive generations of clockmakers, and includes interviews and stories about the clocks and their owners.

Consistent with its mandate of making the art and craft of Mennonite clocks available to the general public, the KCHF sponsored an exhibit of Mennonite clocks at the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum in Steinbach, Manitoba, in 2018. This exhibit was enthusiastically received by visitors from Mennonite and non-Mennonite communities alike, resulting in considerable media attention (see for example "A line into the past" by Aidan Geary, CBC news, October 6, 2018: [newsinteractives.cbc.ca](https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca)). A further exhibit is planned at the Manitoba Museum in 2022. There has also been an expression of interest to host a Mennonite clock exhibition in Abbotsford, British Columbia, and in the Gallery in the Park, Altona, Manitoba. As Mennonite clocks are to be found throughout the world, all over North and South America as well as in Europe, the KCHF may also in the future mount clock exhibits in locations outside Canada, if the logistical and financial challenges of such travelling exhibitions can be overcome.

In the meantime, the KCHF continues to research, document, and preserve the



The people on the left in the photo above are teachers from the Manitoba Teachers' Society who came to John C. Reimer's (man in centre of the photo) small museum for a tour. The photograph was taken on July 17, 1954. The museum was housed in a former dry goods store, established in early Steinbach by Klaas R. Reimer (1837–1906), the grandson of the founder of the 1812 *Kleine Gemeinde* (today the Evangelical Mennonite Conference). Klaas R. and his wife, Katharina, together with eight children joined the migration from the Borosenko Colony in South Russia to Manitoba in 1874, settling in the village of Steinbach. Klaas R. was a man of many interests and abilities. He opened up a flour milling business, growing his own plants in a heated greenhouse, raising, curing and selling meat, and carrying on a blacksmith trade, in addition to running a dry goods store. However, he did experience deep sorrow at the deaths of his first and second wives, marrying yet a third time. In total, they bore him 19 children who were a great help in running his successful endeavours. Klaas R.'s enterprising spirit was a boon to the fledgling village, and he is remembered as a kind and generous man. The store pictured above is located today on the grounds of Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Mennonite Heritage Village, 1966.7000.1490.



The *Rudnerweide Gemeinde*, which later became the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC), was formed under the leadership of four young and committed ministers. It was soon realized that they needed additional ministers to assist with serving the church membership of nearly 1,500 spread across southern Manitoba. A large team of ministers and deacons was chosen and ordained to supplement the ministry of the original four. The photo above shows the enlarged EMMC Ministerial, ca. 1938. Back row (l-r): Isaac Fehr, Glencross; Peter P. Zacharias, Reinland; Jacob Bergen, Rosefarm; Gerhard Froese, Rosefarm; Isaac P. Friesen, Rosenbach, Winkler; Jacob Nickel, Reinland; Peter Berg, Schoenthal, Altona; and Cornelius Stoesz, Bergfeld. Front row: Jacob Gerbrandt, Rosefarm; Peter S. Zacharias, Reinland; Jacob W. Doerksen, Plum Coulee; Jacob H. Friesen, Neu-Bergthal; and Wilhelm H. Falk, Roseville, Altona. For more information, see Jack Heppner, *Search for Renewal: The Story of the Rudnerweider/EMMC* (1987). Photo and text courtesy of Lil Goertzen, EMMC Communications Coordinator <[lilig@emmc.ca](mailto:lilig@emmc.ca)>.

rich heritage of Mennonite clocks, and welcomes communications and input from the community. Clock owners, people with clock stories, and anyone interested in the clocks and wishing to be put on the KCHF mailing list, can contact the foundation at the following email address: [clocks@kroegerclocks.ca](mailto:clocks@kroegerclocks.ca). Donations are gratefully accepted, and can be made online at Canada Helps, or by personal cheque, made out to the Kroeger Clocks Heritage Foundation and addressed to Anikó Szabó, Executive Director, Kroeger Clocks Heritage Foundation, 488 Newman Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3G 2V5.

Donations allow the foundation to make more items from its extensive archive—clocks, photographs, letters, maps, and drawings—accessible to the general public. Judging from the interest in Mennonite clocks expressed in hundreds of emails received by the KCHF, an expansion of its activities cannot come soon enough.

*Rosmarin Heidenreich is Professor Emerita at the Université de Saint-Boniface in Winnipeg, where before her retirement she taught English and translation studies. She is also a founding board member of the Kroeger Clocks Heritage Foundation.*

## Genealogy and Memory

cont'd from p. 3

Related to this, a few years ago I did a quick evaluation of the story of the naming of Alexanderwohl in the Molotschna colony for a friend and decided, based on 4e (internal consistency, physical aspects, hard to believe), that it was probably untrue. A much more detailed analysis by Bob Buller<sup>3</sup> indicates that the event could have happened but does not provide definitive proof that it did happen.

## Endnotes

1. <https://gem.cbc.ca/media/the%20nature-of-things/season-58/episode-6/38e815a-00fb9922920>
2. [http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/EWZ\\_Mennonite\\_Extractions\\_Alphabetized.pdf](http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/EWZ_Mennonite_Extractions_Alphabetized.pdf)
3. <http://bullertime.blogspot.com/2018/05/alexanderwohl-34.html>

## New MCC Archivist

by Conrad Stoesz

There is a new Mennonite archivist in town! Andrew Klassen Brown began his role as Records Manager and Archivist at Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada in December 2020. A series of short-term church and archival jobs helped him prepare for this new role in Winnipeg.



Andrew Klassen Brown. Photo by Conrad Stoesz.

In 2016, Klassen Brown graduated from Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) and was chosen by the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission for the Archival Internship program. He spent a total of five weeks working at each of the Mennonite Brethren archival centres in North America (Fresno, Hillsboro, Winnipeg, and Abbotsford). During this time, Andrew moved his career goal away from becoming a high school teacher and enrolled in a master's degree at CMU in theology and history.

In summer 2017, Andrew landed a term position at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies funded by the Young Canada Works program. Under the supervision of director Jon Isaak, Andrew developed his skills around archival arrangement and description. From 2018 to 2019, Andrew was the executive assistant at Mennonite Church Canada, where he put his organizational skills to good use. Through the denomination's transition to a smaller organization, there was a lot of file sorting to be done.

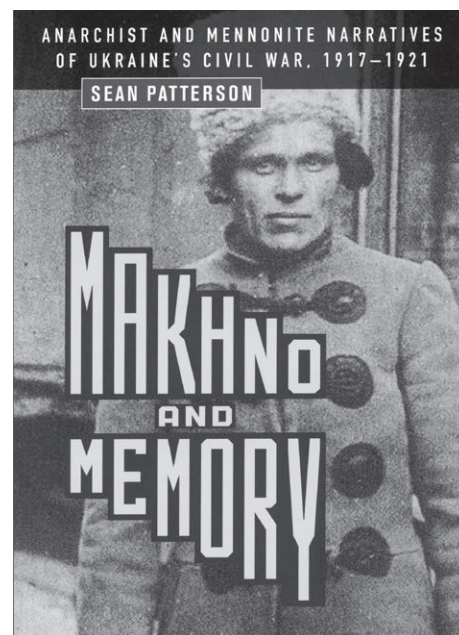
In spring and summer 2020, he worked for the Mennonite Heritage Archives, thanks again to funding from the Young Canada Works program. Andrew organized and described congregational records from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Because of the pandemic, this work was mostly accomplished at home but with daily check-ins via Zoom with archivist Conrad Stoesz. For many of the congregations, he also wrote Facebook posts. This task encouraged deeper thinking about the records he was describing—the congregation, its context, and the people who were part of that community. It led to long discussions about the church, community, and changing values (e.g., urban and rural, conservative

and liberal). The social media posts he created were well received with an average of 7,000 views for each post. According to Andrew, "Working with Mennonite archives has not only been a job for me but has also connected me to people in my community; it's allowed me to learn more about my faith and has paired well alongside my academic work throughout my studies."

Andrew plans to graduate with an MA from CMU in Spring 2021. His thesis explores the connections between apocalyptic expectation and peace theology in the 16th century, using Clemens Adler and Menno Simons as case studies.

Andrew is excited to be in this new role with MCC. "My hope for this role is that I can make the stories of the good work that MCC does around the world and in our backyard accessible—inspiring people in the present and future to continue the vital ministries of relief, development, and peace in the name of Christ."

## Book Review



Sean Patterson, *Makhno and Memory: Anarchist and Mennonite Narratives of Ukraine's Civil War, 1917-1921* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2020), 199 pp.

Reviewed by Richard Thiessen, Abbotsford

The cover of Sean Patterson's *Makhno and Memory* features the provocative image of Nestor Makhno staring back at the reader. As Makhno gazes into the lens of the camera, it is almost as if he is asking the question: "Who do you think I am?" For those of us who have heard the stories of our Mennonite ancestors from a century

ago, we are quite certain that we know the answer to that question—Makhno was the leader of a violent and ruthless group of anarchists who unleashed unfathomable horrors on Mennonites in Ukraine and was responsible for the rape and murder of hundreds of innocent civilians. The brutal events of those days have been etched into the memory not only of those who experienced them, but of their children and grandchildren who heard the horrific accounts of those who survived.

According to Sean Patterson, the author of *Makhno and Memory*, that collective memory on the part of Mennonites and their descendants conflicts with the collective memory of others who lived through those same events. For many in Ukraine today, Nestor Makhno is the Ukrainian Robin Hood—a peasant rebel and hero of the working class. We have all heard the adage that there are two sides to every story, and the truth usually lies somewhere in the middle. In the case of Makhno, is it possible that the truth of who he was lies somewhere in the middle of the starkly conflicting Mennonite and Ukrainian memories?

Sean Patterson explores these conflicting cultural memories and suggests that Makhno has been employed by authors as a metonym—a name that has been associated with both Mennonite suffering and Ukrainian peasant heroism. Patterson's challenge to his readers is to see Makhno as a much more complex individual whose life must be seen within the broader context of an Imperial Russia divided by land hunger and wealth inequality. Patterson explores the various sources—competing histories if you will—dealing with Makhno and brings them into dialogue with each other. These sources include memoirs, diaries, histories, and archival documents.

Patterson's book is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, the myth and legend of Makhno is stripped away and what emerges is a man committed to a specific type of revolutionary justice, including the formation of elected local councils, the equal redistribution of land to peasants, not to the state, and the expulsion of the Austro-German occupying forces. Violence was legitimized as a necessary part of the revolutionary struggle against Ukraine's landowning elite. Makhno saw all members of the working class, even those who were Germans and Mennonites, as potential allies in his fight for justice and

equality. There are even several fascinating accounts of Makhno displaying kindness to Mennonites that he knew from his youth. In the end, Patterson makes it clear that there is no doubt that Makhno's revolution often slipped into wanton terror, although this reality was often only hinted at by Makhnovists.

In chapter two, Patterson explores the Mennonite portrayal of Makhno, one naturally seen through eyes of terror in the face of extreme, brutal violence, including wide-scale rape and murder. Simply put, Makhno is seen as the personification of Evil itself. Interestingly, Makhno is also seen by some Mennonites as a tool used by God to punish them for their perceived collective sins of wealth and the misuse and sometimes even abuse of their Ukrainian neighbours. That disturbing belief in itself warrants further exploration but must be left for another day.

Patterson reviews the 8 November 1919 Eichenfeld Massacre in the third chapter, an event that serves as a case study to explore how both Mennonite and Makhnovist sources have interpreted the story of Makhno. The sources are clear that a massacre in Eichenfeld occurred under Makhnovist occupation, but there is strong evidence that it was motivated more by local tensions between Ukrainian villagers and Mennonites than by Makhno's personal enmity. Attacks were clearly directed at Mennonites who were landowners, and not those who were landless. The attacks for the most part were carried out not against a particular ethnic group but against a socio-economic class. It is clear that the attacks were also a response to the killing by members of the Mennonite *Selbstschutz* of several local militiamen, as well as a response to collaboration of many Mennonites with the occupying Austro-German forces.

Patterson demonstrates that both narratives had their internal critics at the time. There were Makhnovists who grew concerned about the movement's increasing violence and lack of clear leadership, and there were Mennonites who came to see that the resentment of Makhno and the peasant movement was connected to their accumulation of wealth through privilege and exploitation. However, the voices of these internal critics dissipated as Makhno gained either divine or demonic status as narratives and communities parted ways. The narrative on both sides of the field

hardened. The Makhnovist was perceived as a murderous rapist and the Mennonite kulak as a scheming counter-revolutionary agent.

One wonders how a survivor of Makhno's violence would read this book. Would they be willing to even acknowledge that there is another perspective to consider? Would asking a survivor of Makhno's violence to consider another perspective be too much to ask? Perhaps time and space allow us a century later to explore the competing memories and look at the events in their broader context. Doing this in any situation allows us to understand our own history, acknowledge that like most of life, things are usually much more complex than they appear, and accept that others have different experiences and different narratives.

In the end, the fact remains that hundreds of Mennonites did indeed die horrible deaths at the hands of the Makhnovists. The explanations certainly do not justify by any means the violence that took place, but they help us understand why. Perhaps the explanations will cause us to explore our current-day situations from a variety of perspectives, knowing full well that just like a century ago, we live in complex and divisive times, and the lessons of history may very well be able to be applied to our lives today. The role of history is to not only help us understand what happened, and why it happened; the lessons of history can also help us see reoccurring patterns and offer up perspectives that can help us understand our own times, so that mistakes of the past are not repeated.

Sean Patterson's monograph is well written and thoroughly researched. It can serve as a model to other students of Mennonite history as to how to explore our history—our collective memories—and determine how those memories fit with competing memories, both internal as well as external. By acknowledging and understanding the broader and at times competing narratives, Mennonites can come to a fuller and more accurate understanding of their story.

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