

Mennonite Historian

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



Opening celebrations at Canadian Mennonite University (Winnipeg, Manitoba), September 22–24, 2000. The story of this magnificent Tyndall stone building starts on page 2. Photo credit: Aiden Schlichting Enns.

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Shaftesbury Campus at Canadian Mennonite University Marks 100 Years

by Conrad Stoesz

The year 2021 marks the 100th anniversary of CMU's north campus building. The large Tyndall stone building was built at 500 Shaftesbury Blvd. in Winnipeg in 1921 to house students from the Manitoba School for the Deaf starting in September 1922.

The Manitoba School for the Deaf was not an asylum, not a home, not a hospital, not a reformatory, or a charitable institution. The Manitoba School for the Deaf was a school designed to educate children. Begun in 1888, the school occupied its new facilities in 1922 when there were 162 children from 18 different ethnic backgrounds attending the school. While its functions have changed over time, the building has always been used for educational purposes and has become an important Winnipeg landmark.

The land this building currently occupies was part of a large parcel of land controlled by the Hudson's Bay Company starting in 1811. The land along the Assiniboine River was surveyed in 1857 for long narrow farm lots that ran two miles north and south of the river. When the land became part of the Province of Manitoba in 1870, the surveys

were extended to 4 miles. The buildings on Shaftesbury Blvd. were originally part of the Rural Municipality of Assiniboia, west of the town of Tuxedo. The town was founded in 1913 and later incorporated into the city of Winnipeg in 1971.

In the late 1800s, there was growing interest in providing education for deaf children. Local lobbying by Sarah A. McPhee, Francis George Jefferson, and Sidney E. Lang began in 1883. A private school was founded in fall 1888, and the formal establishment of the Manitoba School for the Deaf took place in January 1889. The school outgrew its facilities several times and was relocated during the Great War. However, in 1921–1922 a large castle-like, H-shaped structure, made of Tyndall stone was built at 500 Shaftesbury on a 23.59-acre site.

The building was designed by well-known Winnipeg architect, John D. Atchison, and is a good example of Late Gothic Revival Architecture, popular for the construction of educational buildings. The 84,600 square foot main building and the smaller 12,600 sf service building/dining hall was opened in September 1922. The residential school was built to accommodate 250 students, and, in the first year, there were 162 students. Classrooms were on the first and second floors, with floors three and four designated as dormitories. The large 60-foot tower was dedicated as "McDermid Tower" in honour of Duncan McDermid and his son Howard McDermid, who consecutively served as principals of the school until their deaths.

As Canada ramped up its military efforts, the school was closed after the 1939–1940 school year to make way for a military training facility. The students with hearing loss were either sent to schools in other provinces or attended day classes in other Winnipeg schools. The Royal Canadian Air Force moved its No. 3 wireless training centre into the building starting in January 1941. The first issue of the *Winnipeg W.A.G.* (Wireless Air Gunner) newsletter (Dec. 1941) joked that "the deaf moved out to allow the dumb in." Young trainees began classes on February 17, 1941, as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. Students came from around the commonwealth to train at this facility to become familiar with the Norseman, Tiger Moth, Fort, Finch, and Yale aircraft. After 20 weeks, trainees were able to fulfil the important function of the

W.A.G. onboard aircraft. Others went for a month of training at Bombing and Gunnery School, after which Sergeant's stripes were bestowed on the individual.

At 500 Shaftesbury, additional buildings were erected to house officers and airmen's quarters, mess and drill hall. Training included mathematics, hygiene, anti-gas defense, Air Force Law, Morse code by lamp and buzzer, radio theory, gunnery, rifle and revolver firing. Some remnants of this training facility, such as desks, are still intact in the tower.

After the war, parents of deaf children hoped the school would be returned to its original purpose. However, the government believed having children attend day schools was working and moved the Winnipeg Normal School, later called Teachers' College, to the site. The Manitoba government saw education as a key ingredient to creating loyal Canadian (British) citizens. Educating teachers to instill British values in pupils of all backgrounds was an important way of elevating British identity among a growing and diverse immigrant population.

The teachers were taught the values of progressive educational systems over rote learning. Emphasis was placed on experimentation, experience, and time outside the classroom. The day began with an assembly and the singing of a hymn. There were three classes in the morning and afternoon. Up to 400 soon-to-be teachers attended the residential school from 1947 to 1965 (see photos on page 11).

Many in the deaf community felt the school had been stolen from them and, starting already in 1940, began lobbying to have the school returned to its original intent. Combined with overcrowding in the day schools, families rejoiced when the Manitoba School for the Deaf was re-opened at the 500 Shaftesbury site in 1965. The school enrollment started to decline in the early 1970s. By 1975, there were only 118 students attending. Mainstreaming became the new direction starting in 1976, when 20 students were incorporated into the regular public system.

In 1984, a new gym and covered walk ways were built. In 1996, the school program was relocated to a new but smaller facility in west Winnipeg. For a short time, the Tyndall stone building served as the headquarters for the 1999 Pan American games, hosted by Winnipeg.

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Mennonite Historian is published by the Mennonite Heritage Archives (Mennonite Church Canada, Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies, and Canadian Mennonite University) and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches).

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Subscription rates: \$17.00 per year, \$32.00 for two years, and \$46.00 for three years. Individual subscriptions may be ordered from these addresses.

ISSN: 07008066

Genealogy and Family History

***Unehelich*: Mennonite Genealogy and Illegitimate Births: Part 2 of 3**

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

In Part 2, Glenn gives more examples of how DNA testing helps with genealogical research involving illegitimate (*unehelich*) births. For Part 1, see June 2021 issue.

On June 11, 1794, Helena Neufeld, the unmarried daughter of Solomon Neufeld of Zeyesvorderkampen, gave birth to a son named Peter Esau.¹ Helena immigrated to Russia with the rest of the Neufeld family in 1794,^{2, 3} so his birth location (Prussia or Russia) is uncertain. She and her son, Peter, are included in the family of Solomon Neufeld in the 1795 Chortitza colony census.⁴ His entry in the Schoenhorst church register gives his father's name as Peter Esau.⁵

By January 1795, *Ältester* Gerhard Wiebe of the Neufeld's home congregation in Elbing-Ellerwald, Prussia, was writing to Russia about Helena's unchaste behaviour (*unzuechten Wandel*).⁶ All evidence points to the father as Peter Esau, who was baptized into the Elbing-Ellerwald congregation in 1791.⁷ He was from Zeyersvorderkampen (*ZeierscheKamp* or *Kamp*). Helena Neufeld, who was also from Zeyersvorderkampen, was baptized into the Rosenort congregation the previous year.⁸ Interestingly, no father is given for Peter, Sr., instead *unehelich* is written in the father's name column of the baptismal list.

As was often the case, both Peter and Helena eventually married other people. Peter appears to have married Catharina Reimer, also from Zeyesvorderkampen, sometime between 1795 and 1798.¹ Peter Esau and his family immigrated from nearby Neudorf, West Prussia, to Halbstadt, in the Molotschna colony in 1803.^{2, 9} The 1835 census gives his patronymic (i.e., his father's name) as Peter.⁹ This is a very rare case of both father and son being born out of wedlock. Yet the Y-DNA results for male Esau descendants of Peter Esau (1794–1874) match the other Esau men in the Mennonite DNA project! It just so happened that, in both cases (father and son), the son was given the family name

of his biological father, even though the parents never married. This was usually not the case.

The partitioning of Poland in 1772 put nearly all Low-German Mennonites in the new province of West Prussia. On November 1, 1772, the Mennonites of West Prussia were told by the new government to begin records of births, marriages, and deaths.^{10, 11} Before this time, very few Mennonite church records were kept. At that time, the Prussian Mennonites belonged to the Flemish (58%), Frisian (39%), or Old Flemish (3%) churches.¹² In cases of illegitimate births, the mother and father (if his identity was known) were excommunicated from the church.

Since Mennonites were a small minority in Prussia, it was also quite possible for a relationship to occur between a Mennonite and a Lutheran or Catholic, which would result in an illegitimate child. If the woman was not a Mennonite, the birth would be recorded in the appropriate Lutheran or Catholic church register as an illegitimate birth. For example, on July 21, 1754, the Stuhm Lutheran birth register records the birth of Anna, the illegitimate daughter of Elisabeth Schott and an unnamed Mennonite man from Rudnerweide.¹³ Rudnerweide was a predominantly Mennonite village. This birth predates the existence of Mennonite records from the region.

The Flemish Mennonites were a somewhat more puritanical group, and illegitimate births were rarely recorded. The Frisians were more likely to record such a birth. Since infant baptism was such an important rite for the Lutherans and Catholics, infants were christened and named, legitimate or not. In 1800, the Prussian government required that the State Church, which was the Lutheran church, record the births, marriages, and deaths of all Mennonites within their jurisdictions.

As a result, many illegitimate Mennonite births, not found in Mennonite records, can be found in Lutheran records. In some cases, the father, whose name is missing from the Mennonite birth register, is named in the register of the nearby Lutheran Church. For example, the Marienwerder Lutheran records show that the unmarried Greta (Margaretha) Fries(en) of Oberfeld

gave birth to a son named Peter on April 22, 1804. The father's name is given as Peter Dyck. The Heubuden (Flemish) Mennonite register gives only the birth of Peter Dyck, with no father's name or any indication of illegitimacy. This Peter Dyck was baptized into the Heubuden church in 1822 where the baptismal register gives his father's name as Peter Dyck. The Heubuden register was started in 1772, but the first illegitimate birth is not recorded until 1822! Many of those born after 1800 are found in the records of the nearby Lutheran congregations.

On March 12, 1816, the birth of Maria, illegitimate daughter of Maria Martens of Reimerswald, was recorded in the Lutheran birth register of Tiegenhof.¹³ The father's name was given as Peter Daniels. The Frisian Mennonite records also give the father's name.¹⁴ Peter Daniels and Maria Martens were in their 20s and unmarried. They eventually married other people. The daughter, Maria, took the surname Martens and eventually immigrated to Russia with her mother's family.¹⁵

A major source of information on illegitimate births to members of the Mennonite churches in West Prussia are the records of those who joined or left a particular church. These records include routine transfers between churches as well as disciplinary records. The latter include information on those who were excommunicated and those in danger of excommunication. In some cases, an illegitimate birth was involved.

According to the records of the Tiegenhagen church, Justina, daughter of David Bergmann of Hauskamp in the Danziger Niederung, was expelled from the church on July 3, 1825, for having had an illegitimate son with an unnamed Lutheran man.¹⁶ Other records show that a son, Johann, was born on May 18.¹⁷ She was accepted back into the congregation on the 28th. Justina Bergmann died on February 9, 1829, in Hauskamp, leaving little Johann in the care of her family.¹⁸ In 1840, he immigrated to the Chortitza colony with his aunt, Margaretha (Bergmann) Rempel, who was married to a Bernhard Rempel. Johann later moved to the Bergthal colony, and then to Manitoba (see a copy of his emigration document on page 9).^{19, 1} The Y-DNA test results of a great grandson

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Friedrichsthal: Last Village of the Bergthal Colony: Part 2 of 2

by Ernest N. Braun

In the June 2021 issue, Ernest described in Part 1 the formation, demographic, layout, way of life, and leadership of Friedrichsthal, the last of the Bergthal Colony villages in Ukraine. What follows is Part 2, the conclusion to Ernest's article, including what became of the Friedrichsthals that immigrated to Canada and what remains of the village footprint today in Ukraine.

The entire 24-year lifespan of the Friedrichsthal village in the Bergthal Colony in southern Russia could be characterized as turbulent. First, hostilities with Turkey developed in 1853 just after the village was founded. The resulting Crimean War broke out in early 1854, affecting the village until at least 1856, largely because of its location not far from Crimea but far enough to allow it to be useful to the military. An immediate consequence was a new "voluntary" levy on the foreign colonies, amounting to five rubles per villager, and one ruble per cottager, which for the Bergthal Colony amounted to 772 rubles collected to provide aid for wounded and sick soldiers.¹

By 1854, Mennonites from Chortitz and Molotschna were providing wagons, provisions, feed, and medical care to the army. Then, by late spring 1855, the War arrived in Mariupol, with immediate consequences for Bergthal villages, including Friedrichsthal. Sick/injured soldiers and prisoners of war were evacuated from field hospitals, and refugees fled the coastal regions of the Sea of Azov for the Bergthal villages. Now requisitions of horses, wagons, drivers, and houses for billeting the injured made life busy and dangerous, as drivers and wagons spent weeks on impassable roads trying to supply the troops and bring back the wounded. While there, it is entirely possible that some Mennonites witnessed the famous charge of the Light Brigade from behind the Russian guns. Young Mennonite men were exposed to the realities of war and the lifestyle of soldiers, and the home environment was influenced by the presence of injured soldiers billeted there.

The War had economic effects as well, affecting the Mennonites both positively

and negatively. A grasshopper plague devastated the grain crop in 1855, raising the price of grain as demand climbed.² The consumption by the army further increased demand so that those few who had a crop did well. At home during this time, extra employment in shoeing horses, repairing wagons and harnesses, providing hay, and selling farm-gate products provided income. Drivers were paid 50 kopeks a day, but for many the costs outweighed the payment, especially for cottagers who could not afford to be gone for weeks. More than a few Mennonite men lost their lives on the long journey due to typhoid, which they contracted in the camps.

A consequence of the War was the devaluation of the ruble, for the Russian treasury was badly depleted. This increased the price of land. Some entrepreneurs cashed in on the demands for produce, hay, and wagons. Many military men with estates and titles came into contact with competent Mennonites, and a much more significant integration of Mennonites beyond the colony resulted, as they were hired to manage estates or rent land or otherwise be engaged as tradespeople.

During the War and perhaps as a direct consequence of it, the ongoing cholera epidemic reached into the village, causing the death of children in particular. Although the causes of the deaths cannot be confirmed, numerous deaths within a family within three months denote an outbreak of some kind, often cholera, diphtheria, typhoid, and the like. For example, in ten years from 1855–1865, Peter Buhr of Friedrichsthal lost his wife, three newborns, three children under four years, and a nine-year-old. Most families lost at least one child, and many lost several children and often an adult as well.

Another major shake-up was the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, which bankrupted many large estates and created a new work force for Mennonites, as the serfs did not receive enough land to survive and ended up working for landowners. Opportunities to buy land from bankrupt estates in the area arose, although Friedrichsthal farmers were still too much in survival mode to take much advantage. However, many of them employed the newly liberated serfs, giving younger Mennonites exposure to Ukrainian influence, including the language that served them later when in the 1890s many Ukrainians with similar dialects moved

into southeastern Manitoba and interacted with Mennonites there.³

A direct result of the Crimean War and the emancipation of the serfs was the increased development of the area. Increased acreage of grain saw a sharp rise in grain production and exports through ports on the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, and the railway was not far behind. However, the long-term result of the War was to be catastrophic for Bergthal; it was the humiliating loss of the War that caused Russia to reform just about everything, and Mennonites lost their special status on a number of fronts, with the result that the Bergthal Colony emigrated and ceased to exist.⁴ Ironically, Friedrichsthal was sold just on the cusp of a huge expansion of population and agricultural activity.

Value of land

No records survive of the actual sale of the village, but sales of Friedrichsthal properties in whole or in part can be seen in earlier Waisenamt debt records for 1869–1872. In 1869, an established village farm (listed as *Feuerstelle* and probably referring to the village lot and buildings only) sold for 1,769R, a half farm (land only) sold for 1,250R, and a quarter farm (land only) 500R or 38R per desiatin.⁵ In neighbouring Schönthal, the estate of Abraham Doerksen (1805–1871) was sold in November 1871 via the Waisenamt to the family perhaps a bit below market price, which was as follows: an established village lot (*Feuerstelle*) for 1,000R, and two half farms for 1,250R each, totaling 3,500R.⁶ Two other sales of a full-holding show a range of 4,025R (Schönthal, December 1871) to 3,665R (Heuboden, January 1872) for an average of 3,845R.⁷ Records of cottager lot sales in the same timeframe show a Schönthal sale for 586R (February 1872), and a Bergthal sale for 714.45R (October 1871), averaging 650R.⁸ These values would be at the upper end of the scale for Friedrichsthal at that time.

Moreover, by 1875, mass emigration and forced sales depressed values considerably. In order to establish values for the sale, the Bergthal Colony secretary, Jakob Friesen, used the same formula for all five villages. He standardized the value of each full-holding land allotment at 1,360R (cf. 2,500R in 1871) or 21R per desiatin, and partial units depending on the percentage of a full-holding.⁹ Buildings were appraised separately

according to insured value. In the village of Bergthal, for which this information has survived, insured value of farm buildings ranged mainly from 900 to 1,400R (with a few inexplicably as low as 300–400R), averaging about 1,050R. By 1875, each full-holding in Bergthal at 1,360 + 1,050 = 2,410R had already lost about 37% in value from 3,845R just four years earlier. The actual numbers for Friedrichsthal have not been found yet, but full-holdings in Friedrichsthal, as a younger village, would be at the lower end of the range on average, perhaps under 2,000R.

One document (likely dating from 1874) listing 12 landless families (cottagers) in the village of Bergthal shows that these younger couples or retired farmers/widows had a range of building values from 300 to 480R (with two inexplicable exceptions double or triple that amount).¹⁰ Compared to pre-emigration prices (avg. 650R), this constitutes about a 40% loss in value.

Emigration

The reasons for the dissolution of the village and emigration from Ukraine have been published elsewhere; suffice it to say that rapid changes in political, religious, and social environments, combined with the perennial problem of landlessness resulted in the sale of the village in 1875–1876.¹¹ After the return of the delegates in the fall of 1873, Friedrichsthal, along with the other four Bergthal villages, made the decision to leave Russia. However, that decision could not be effected until permission to emigrate and passports could be obtained.

After several years of mixed signals, the Russian government finally dispatched General Eduard von Todleben, a man well-known to the Mennonites as a hero of the Crimean War, to the Molotschna in an 11th-hour attempt to prevent the loss of Mennonite farmers by offering alternative service and delaying its implementation until 1880. In late April/early May 1874, when plans to emigrate had been set in place but no property in the Bergthal Colony had been sold, Todleben met with civic and church leaders to spell out the new conditions. A few days later, after consulting again with their home church members in the Bergthal Colony, *Ältester* Wiebe and Rev. Cornelius Stoesz returned to Todleben and gave the answer: “the [Bergthal] church is fearful about the future,” and requested permission to emigrate.¹² After some more questions, which Wiebe answered in ways that the

General perhaps did not expect, Todleben gave permission and promised passports, which *Oberschulze* Peters then fetched from Ekaterinoslav, clearing that legal hurdle.

However, emigration posed some unique challenges beyond the matter of passports. To begin with, Friedrichsthal, like the other Bergthal villages, stood on Crown land, and no title to that land had been acquired upon its establishment in 1852. In the mid-1860s, an application for title had been initiated by the Bergthal Colony, but it was not finalized until 1872, and then only upon the condition that the land not be sold for at least three years.¹³ A request in 1874 for permission to sell the villages was therefore problematic, and permission was grudgingly granted, but only if all sales were delayed to 1875.

The delayed sale would mean that the entire 1874 contingent of emigrants, including several prominent Friedrichsthalers, would leave without any cash from the sale of their land, often selling their crops standing in the fields for whatever they could get for them. A further complication was that the final approval to sell was stalled by the local bureaucrat in charge (called a *Friedensrichter* by *Ältester* Wiebe) who felt slighted by *Oberschulze* Jacob Peters, since the latter had failed to notify him that he was leaving for America to explore emigration options. Only a substantial bribe of 500 silver rubles finally convinced the official, and permission documents arrived shortly thereafter. On June 28 (N.S.), 1874, the first Bergthalers boarded a train at Nikolajevsk station in Taganrog, having sold chattels only and leaving their houses and lands without having received a single kopek.¹⁴

Another difficulty was that the village was owned as a unit, so that each family did not initially have individual title to their property, much like the Life-Lease condos that are reinventing the concept today in Canada. That meant certain restrictions, such as the inability to mortgage the property, limits on who one could sell the property to, and indivisibility of the property (this latter restriction was lifted in 1869). Each village needed to delegate authorized agents in whom complete trust was invested, agents who then offered each village as a package deal to potential buyers. These buyers were other German colonies nearby who also had a landless population. The agents for Friedrichsthal

have not been identified to my knowledge, although *Ältester* Wiebe names Rev. Franz Dyck of Friedrichsthal as remaining behind to comply with the decision made by the Colony to have one agent stay behind for a year longer to tie up loose ends.¹⁵

When permissions and passports were obtained, all the villagers signed off at the home of the village mayor (probably Heinrich Dyck, Sr.), with the understanding that all the properties in each village would be sold together. In 1875–1876, the entire village, with its 30 house lots, its 5,271 +/- acres (including common pasture, woodland, and hay land), as well as the strip of houses north of the street belonging to landless families, was sold to surrounding Ukrainian landowners with oversight by Rev. Franz Dyck and support from *Oberschulze* Peters and Rev. Peter Klippenstein of Heuboden. Payment in most cases (Heuboden was paid out earliest) was to be in installments, with about 40% down-payment (likely a prerequisite for moving in), and the remainder over several years. In the summer of 1876, *Oberschulze* Jacob Peters arrived in Manitoba with a substantial sum of money, likely in large part for Friedrichsthal, for he called a meeting on August 21 for all the Friedrichsthalers to meet him in Chortitz for the distribution of the money he had brought along.¹⁶

While my family legend has distinct memories of the Waisenamt reduction of assets by 25%, there is no family story of not receiving due payment for their properties in Friedrichsthal, minus of course the 9% expenses deducted by the authorized agents (*Bevollmächtigten* as *Ältester* Wiebe calls them).¹⁷ And by 1876, the exchange rate had fallen almost five cents against the dollar and another cent by 1880. A further complication was the refusal of Chortitzer Colony to honour fully the fire insurance losses incurred in Bergthal in 1875, causing the Bergthal Colony to levy another 7,000R to pay out the homeowners who lost their homes. In 1880, after factoring in the reductions, expenses, and costs, the actual money value for a full-holding averaged approximately 2,100R, or less than 60% of full pre-emigration value (avg. 3,845R).¹⁸ Cottagers at that rate would have had less than 400R coming to them, and the fact that, as Klaas Peters notes, the cottager houses in Friedrichsthal were dismantled

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Mennonite Heritage Archives

A New Look at an Old Diary

by Alf Redekopp, St. Catharines, Ontario

The diary of Johannes Dietrich Dyck was brought to the Mennonite Heritage Archives over 20 years ago. The donors were Dyck descendants who had used the materials to produce a family history, and as a final step in that process, they deposited some of that work and the key source documents in the archives. I was part of the archival staff that accessioned the material, created an inventory list, wrote a brief description, and transferred the diary for permanent safekeeping to the vault, where it would be preserved and accessible to future generations.

Johannes Dietrich Dyck is often distinguished in family folklore from other Johannes Dycks as “the 49er” because of his adventurous young adulthood. He left for America in 1848 to make his fortune in the 1849 California Gold Rush, returning 10 years later, marrying, and moving to the Am Trakt Settlement in Russia a year later in 1860. The diary was begun over a decade later in 1871, after he had established his farming operation and raised several children, but shortly before he was elected as the district civic administrator (*Oberschulze*). Johannes held that office for 18 years.

Excerpts from Johannes’s diary were translated and included in the family history book entitled *A Pilgrim People, Volume II: Johannes J. Dyck, 1885–1948, Johannes J. Dyck, 1860–1920, Johannes D. Dyck, 1826–1898* (Winnipeg: George and Rena Kroeker, 1994). Additional family history can be found in Jacob J. Dyck, *Am Trakt to America: A History and Genealogy*, compiled by D. Frederick Dyck and others, published in 2000. The diary gives many glimpses into the rhythm of life in a late 19th-century eastern European agricultural community. One learns of the modes of transportation, the increased mechanization of agricultural practises, the impact of weather on farming, and the development of social welfare institutions, such as fire protection, crop insurance, and the welfare of widows and orphans.

Little did I know when I first examined this diary 20+ years ago, that someday I would be asked to create an English translation; nor could I ever have imagined what I might find in the process.

Reading the diary closely now for the purpose of translation, so many years later, resulted in several discoveries that helped me make significant revisions to at least two biographies of 19th-century church leaders in GAMEO (Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online). Plus, I was able to add numerous birth, marriage, and death records to GRanDMA (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry) and make or renew friendships with like-minded genealogist/family historians during a period of physical and social restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

GAMEO revisions

David Hamm, born in Prussia, elected as a minister of the Koepental-Ohrloff Mennonite Church, Trakt settlement, Samara Province in Russia in 1853, served as bishop from 1858 to 1884. All contemporary sources, including P.M. Friesen’s *Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia* first published in 1914, are silent about his final years. And because Johann Quiring (1851–1912) served this congregation as its bishop from 1884 until his death in 1912, some subsequent historians have assumed that David Hamm must have died around 1884. However, thanks to this diary, we now know that he did not die until a decade later in 1894, and we also know that he was removed from office by the church. To read the revised GAMEO article, see [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hamm,_David_\(1822-1894\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hamm,_David_(1822-1894)).

Another revised GAMEO biography that grew directly out of a new look at the Johannes Dyck diary was that of minister and *Ältester* of the Ladekopp Mennonite Church, Johann Toews (1803–1889). In this case, I discovered that there were three entries in GAMEO that pertained to the same person. With numerous references to this church leader in the diary, including his age at the time of death, which matched a reference in the *Mennonitische Blätter* from the same month and year, a single revised entry could be created for the encyclopedia. To read the revised GAMEO article, see [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Toews,_Johann_\(1803-1889\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Toews,_Johann_(1803-1889)).

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Voices from EMC & EMMC



This July marks 70 years since revival swept through the Rosenort, Manitoba, area. After a week and a half of messages that seemed to have little impact, Mom Plett, pictured in the background, responded to Rev. Ben D. Reimer’s call to repentance and many others followed, including more than fifty youth who surrendered to Jesus on one night alone. The ripple effect continued as EMC missionaries were sent out over the following years. Pictured here are newlyweds, Edward Friesen (1933–2013) and Leona Friesen (née Plett), on the hood of their ‘home on wheels’ on August 26, 1958, the day before leaving for ministry in Mexico. Text and photo credit: Leona (Plett) Friesen.



Church practises in the new Rudnerweider Gemeinde context (EMMC) were borrowed directly from the parent Sommerfelder Church. New practices were gradually adopted that eventually gave the new church a unique character. The Bishop was elected by the congregation to be the leader of the ministerial as well as the congregation. He was responsible to his fellow ministers and the brotherhood, and held a position that was highly esteemed and had considerable power connected with it. He was the only person who performed baptisms and offered communion to the members. Bishop Wilhelm Falk was very clear that the Lord’s Supper was to be strictly a memorial service. He maintained the practice of personally passing the bread to each participant. The common cup was passed with each individual wiping the rim after they had partaken. See communion set in photo above. Text and photo credit: Lil Goertzen.

Book Reviews

Abe J. Dueck, *Mennonite Brethren Bible College: A History of Competing Visions* (Winnipeg: Kindred, 2021), 220 pp.

Reviewed by Randy Klassen, Saskatoon

Meticulous, methodical, and measured—these are, it seems to me, signs that Abe Dueck’s recent book is a labour of love. This well-written history of MBBC explores in careful detail the institution that was at the heart of the Canadian MB conference for most of its 20th-century life—indeed, the “Canadian Conference” was born (as a legal, national entity) out of the desire to establish a national school of higher education. As such, this history is much more than the story of one school. At many points, it invites reflection on the life and activity of the denomination itself.

For me, and for many who have been shaped by this school, this history also invites much self-reflection, because the values we caught, and the experiences we had, are being placed in a larger context. It holds up a large mirror to our “college years” and I can see more clearly the denominational story of which I am gratefully a part. But also, we are shown the tensions, uncertainties, biases, and even disputes that are part of this inheritance. This makes it difficult for me to write merely a review of this book; it is also a response and a reflection of my own participation in the story of MBBC.

Dueck writes from the centre of this story. This was, in many ways, *his* story to tell. Himself an alumnus of MBBC, and much of his career spent as faculty and academic dean, he brings an intimate awareness of the conversations and currents that shaped the school. This closeness to the story also brings natural limitations, as we shall see.

The book is structured straightforwardly. A brief introduction provides indispensable background to both the denominational and educational context. The history is then presented in four sections, which already hint at one of the key “competing visions”: namely, Part I, “No Other Foundation”—a biblical allusion that is also a core Anabaptist phrase, coming from Menno Simons’s writings; this section covers the founding of the school until the 1960s. Part II is a “Mid-Life Crisis,” suggesting that the College’s Anabaptist orientation is being tested or contested; the crisis in



question took place in the late 1960s/early '70s. Part III is a “Renewed Search for a Credible Vision,” followed by the final overview and reflections in Part IV. These four sections are further subdivided into 14 chapters, including one chapter for each of the ten presidencies.

As I followed the story of MBBC in this work, much was familiar in its general contours, but presented with a historian’s precision and clarity. Some things didn’t surprise me: for example, the importance, and divisiveness, of the German language in MBBC’s early years. (German was for many a tool of discipleship, helping the next generation “keep the faith.”) Or the fact that some didn’t appreciate or support the College’s music education; they saw it as too focused on “performance, which generally meant, too classical or sophisticated. (It is perhaps ironic that my experience of MBBC’s classical music education in the 1980s, including singing many choral greats in the original German, helped me greatly in my university German class!)

But there were, for me, many more surprises and revelations: for example, the amount of heat generated by the tension between “Bible college,” “college of arts,” and “seminary” education; the tensions among and between different administrations and presidents; and (I hesitate to admit) the fact that Concord was indeed a new college, not just a new name. (I was out of the country during that transitional time, so apparently I wasn’t paying as close attention to institutional affairs.)

The strength of Dueck’s work lies in his meticulous research and chronicling



of the story. As mentioned above, Dueck tells the story from close to the centre. He was party to the inner life of the school for some 23 years. He refers extensively and almost exclusively to conference and college board reports and minutes. But this internal location and attention to internal detail often led, for me, to questions of larger context, or of how the “competing visions” (when the competition was external, not internal) might be more nuanced. One example might be in the discussions of the tensions between the “evangelical Anabaptism” of the “Toews School” (as I might name it, referring to both JB and JA) vs the Evangelical-Pietist directions of Victor Adrian. It would be helpful to have a bit more context of the currents in North American evangelical and Mennonite circles at the time (or even within larger MB circles, such as Delbert Wiens’s “Wineskins” manifesto of 1965). I also would have liked a bit clearer outline of the evolving nature of secondary and college education in Canada over the decades of the College’s existence, and how that related to the different programs and degrees MBBC offered. Throughout the book, I regularly found myself asking, what’s the larger picture here? What ecclesial, political, or cultural currents are swirling around this particular issue at MBBC?

But in the end, all of these questions reinforce the importance of Dueck’s work as a necessary foundation. His thorough assemblage of internal data now invites numerous explorations of the intersections and trajectories of the MBBC story, within the context not only of the Canadian MB Conference, but also the larger setting of North American religious life and society as a whole.

Randy Klassen is a grateful alumnus of MBBC (1984) with fond memories of Abe’s quiet voice, meticulous lectures, and wry humour. Having been a choir director, pastor, and Bible teacher, he now serves with MCC Saskatchewan in Saskatoon as Indigenous Neighbours coordinator.

Friedrichsthal

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by the new Ukrainian owners indicates what kind of market value they will have had.¹⁹ The “poor” had no money at all, only debt, and became further indebted by the travel costs and start-up in Manitoba.

Debt transfer

As *Ältester* Wiebe describes in his book, the plan was to emigrate as an entire colony, those who could fund their journey as well as those who could not.²⁰ To this end, the Waisenamt debts were adjusted, providing discounts on amounts owed and withdrawing a percentage from those who had assets in the Waisenamt. The way this played out in Friedrichsthal was that, in the last record of the accounts for Friedrichsthal (adjusted to 1876), six names had no record of debt at all, among them Kornelius Wiebe, Sr.; these likely suffered the 25% capital withdrawal “for the poor.” Then there were 31 who had debt but were able to pay it off before emigration began. Nine more who paid their debt in 1875 qualified for the 33.3% discount on payment devised by the Waisenamt. Lastly, there were 15 who transferred debt to America in some form, and another nine or ten are not listed there at all.

In total, the amount of debt carried by Friedrichsthal emigrants came to just over 5,500R. At the exchange rate of approximately \$0.61, this equals almost \$3,360 in 1875 dollars (rates fluctuated but usually are calculated at \$0.6083 cents per ruble in Manitoba). The Waisenamt files contain pages and pages of detailed calculations as village debts and assets are calculated and discounted and recalculated, until one page inexplicably has “*Vater unser*” (Our Father, the title of the Lord’s Prayer) written neatly amid a profusion of calculations and names, likely a testimony to the desperation of the scribe who needed to balance all this for a wholesale emigration and still be fair to all parties.²¹

Friedrichsthalers in Manitoba

In the end, Friedrichsthal had 33 landowners for 30 full farms, meaning that several had subdivided theirs, and at least 22 landless residents in 1869, most owning a cottage in the village.²² By 1875, many new young families who will not have owned any property brought the number of resident families to about 70.²³ The maximum number of house lots that

Friedrichsthal could accommodate would be between 58 and 60. The other families, likely young marrieds, would still be living in the *Somma-stow* (unheated room in the main house) of the parents or on rented land. By that time, only nine of the original 17 settlers remained in the village. The increase was mostly from within as the next generation married (often to somebody in the village) and established new homes or brought spouses from elsewhere. Most of its residents left in 1875 aboard the *SS Manitoban*, with a few early departures in 1874, such as David Stoesz and Thomas Sawatzky aboard *SS Peruvian*, and a final contingent on the *SS Sardinian* in July 1876. The initial destination for almost all Friedrichsthalers was the East Reserve (ER).

In Manitoba, the village of Schönsee was founded by two waves of arrivals, most on *SS Manitoban* in 1875 and others, including Rev. Franz Dueck on *SS Sardinian* in 1876, for a total of 12 out of 19 families listed under Schönsee in the 1876 Brotschuld records, almost all connected to Kornelius and Helena (Klassen) Wiebe who formed the nucleus of the village.²⁴ A new Friedrichsthal established two miles northwest of Schönsee was founded by another cluster of eight Friedrichsthalers, notably the descendants of Peter Harder (1786–1849) and his four wives (who all died in Russia). Just north of Friedrichsthal, another group of about six Friedrichsthalers founded Blumstein, including Thomas Sawatzky, Daniel Blatz, and Jacob Stoesz. Another smaller nucleus was Schanzenburg near the original immigration sheds south of modern day Niverville, where Gerhard Kliewer and the Buhr family anchored a small group of Friedrichsthalers. There were also scattered families in Grunthal, Gnadenfeld, Schönenberg, Pastwa, and Kronsgart.

After a short stint on the ER, numerous Friedrichsthalers joined the exodus to the West Reserve (WR), an exodus carefully polled by Rev. Franz Dueck of Schönsee, who estimated that over half of all ER settlers desired to relocate to the WR. One or two families that left Ukraine in 1875–1876 went directly to the WR. The David Harder family arrived in Manitoba but soon left for Minnesota.

Notable Friedrichsthalers

Johann Abrams—group leader for 1875 *SS Manitoban*, founding spirit of

Friedrichsthal ER; **Johann Bergman**—negotiator in meetings with Russian government, group leader for 1877 *SS Sarmatian*, and quarterback for the sales of the villages of the Bergthaler Colony; **Johann Braun**—ER entrepreneur (Braun & Krahn in Grunthal), long-time Reeve of RM of Hanover; **Franz Dueck**—minister in Russia/Manitoba, assistant to *Oberschulze* Peters in emigration matters; **Peter Friesen** (b. 1828)—teacher (later to Puchtin), group leader for the 1875 *SS Canadian*; **Gerhard Kliewer**—first reeve of RM of Hanover in Manitoba, anchor pioneer of Schanzenburg ER;²⁵ **Klaas Peters**—teacher in Manitoba, Canadian emigration agent, author of history book, *Die Bergthaler Mennoniten*, 1925; **David Stoesz**—teacher and minister (ordained in 1869) in Russia, diarist, and in 1882, Chortitzer bishop in Manitoba; **Jacob Stoesz**—Fire insurance (*Brandordnung*) overseer on ER and general supervisor of all Mennonite fire insurance agencies in Manitoba and Minnesota.

Conclusion: Friedrichsthal today

Today, the two rivers originally meeting at Friedrichsthal are hardly discernible. The Karatysh River has been dammed just north of the confluence of the two to create a substantial man-made lake, and the Vodina River also has been dammed upstream from Friedrichsthal to create another long lake, leaving a wide, dry riverbed south of the village itself. Friedrichsthal, called Fedorivka (in Russian Fedorovka), lies in the Nikolskyi District, Donetsk Oblast, still extending along the north side of the now dry creek-bed in long cultivated strips for about two kilometers. The population is about 520 (2001 census, but current unrest likely means the population has not increased) of which 2/3 are Ukrainian and 1/3 are Russian speakers. The Fedorivsky forest stands near the village, a legacy of the founding Mennonites, and one of the few forests in the Azov region. The street of the original village still has a discernible line of trees lining it on one side. A new suburb has appeared south of the river on what would have been Cossack land in the day of the Mennonites.

There is no record of any Canadian Mennonites making contact with Friedrichsthal for many decades after emigration, although a Mennonite from Canada did visit some of the other villages in 1905–1906. Apparently, not until



The road into Friedrichsthal in 2001. The village is now called Федорівка (Fedorivka [Ukrainian]). Note the road sign at the right. Photo credit: Al Hamm, Steinbach.

1976 and again in 1979 did a Canadian Mennonite, the late William Schroeder, actually set foot in Friedrichsthal itself. Orlando Hiebert visited the village in 1994 and may have been the second to do so. Since then, the village has been visited a dozen times by various heritage tours, but in the last ten years the unrest in the area has made any foreign visit impossible.

More information will likely come to light when the Odessa State Archive is more fully available, or perhaps when other memorabilia of former Bergthal emigrants is discovered. This paper is an introductory work. Hopefully, more can be done as other materials surface.

Ernest N. Braun is a retired educator who enjoys researching, mapping, and writing on topics of Mennonite history. In 2014, he received the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba's award for Historical Preservation and Promotion. The Historical Atlas of the East Reserve (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2015), which he co-edited with Glen R. Klassen, is in its fourth printing. He lives on an acreage farm near Niverville, Manitoba.

Endnotes

1. For full treatment of the effect of the War on Mennonites, see J. Urry and L. Klippenstein, "Mennonites and the Crimean War 1854–56," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 7 (1989): 9–32.
2. Alexander Petzholdt, *Reise im Westlichen und Südlichen Europäischen Russland im Jahre 1855* (Gera: C.B. Griesbach Verlag, 1855), 183.
3. See Johann Braun, *Grunthal History* (Grunthal: History Committee, 1974), 35.
4. Bergthal village was sold to German colonists, which included my wife's Prussian German grandfather who lived there from 1877 until he got married in 1898. They spoke the identical Low

German that the Mennonites did, as Sarah Warkentin verifies in her autobiography ("The Life and Experiences of Sarah Harder Warkentin," *Journal of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia* 8, no. 4 [1985]: 44).

5. See MHA Waisenamt: 4 *Schuldbuch*, Box 1, Type 4, File 2, images 0274, 0290, and 0310.

6. MHA Waisenamt: 8 Auctions, Box 1, Type 8, File 1, image 3544. Editor J. Toews in the Klaus book provides an estimate of 3,000–3,500R for a Bergthal Colony full-holding (A.A. Klaus, *Unsere Kolonien: Studien und Materialien zur Geschichte und Statistik*

der ausländischen Kolonisation in Russland [Odessa: Odessaer Zeitung Verlag, 1887], 259).

7. MHA Waisenamt: 8 Auctions, Box 1, Type 8, File 1 images 3545, 3549.

8. MHA Waisenamt: 8 Auctions, Box 1, Type 8, File 1, images 3551, 3534.

9. Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America* (Winnipeg: MMHS, 1981), 50.

10. MHA Waisenamt: 4 *Schuldbuch*, Box 1, Type 4, Box 1, File, image 9986.

11. See Ernest N. Braun, "Why Emigrate," *Preservings* 34 (2014): 4–10.

12. Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration*, 39.

13. There is some confusion about when that title was received, but when it came there was an additional restriction that it could not be sold for three years, which ended in 1875 (John Dyck, *Oberschulze Jakob Peters 1813–1884* [Steinbach: HSHS, 1990], 61–62).

14. Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration*, 39–49.

15. *Ibid.*, 35–37, 49–50.

16. David Stoesz, "Ältester David Stoesz Journal," in *Historical Sketches of East Reserve* (Steinbach: HSHS, 1994), 418. See Dyck, *Oberschulze Jakob Peters*, 119.

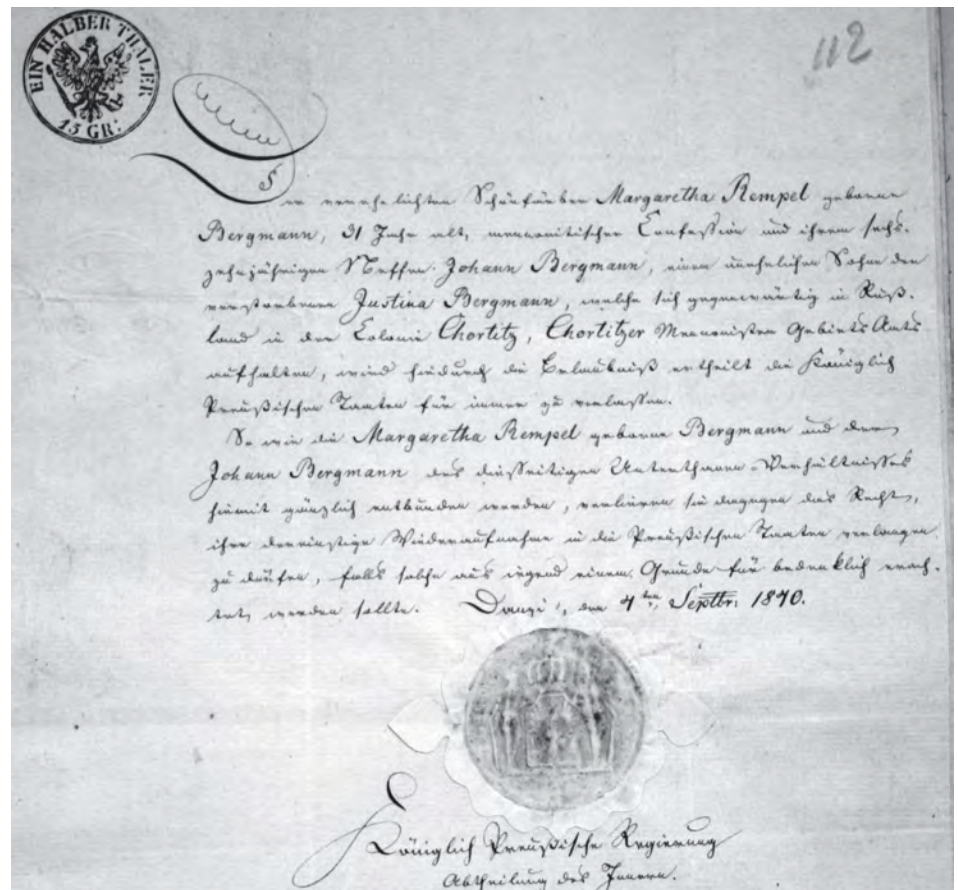
17. For Bergthal and Schönfeld, Erdman Buhr charged 500R per village for collecting/sending the money. Letters show that Bergthal never did receive all the money from the sale (Waisenamt: 4 *Schuldbuch*, Box 1, Type 4, File 25, images 0806-7).

18. Value reduced by Friesen on land, low insured values, sales expenses of 9%, devaluation of the ruble, Waisenamt levies.

19. Klaas Peters, *The Bergthaler Mennonites* (Winnipeg: CMBC, 1988), 23.

20. Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration*, 36.

21. MHA Waisenamt: 4 *Schuldbuch*, Box 1, Type 4, File 8A, image 4396.



A copy of the emigration document for Johann Bergmann, dated September 1870. See article on pages 3 and 10. Photo credit: Glenn Penner.

22. MHA Waisenamt: 4 *Schuldbuch*, Box 1, Type 4, File 2, image 0266.

23. A cross-referencing of the surviving Waisenamt debtors registers with voters' lists (not counting Erdman Buhr).

24. "Index to the 1876 Chortitzer Brotschuld Register," *Settlers of the East Reserve* (Winnipeg: MMHS, 2009), 77.

25. Kliewer, who had private land outside Friedrichsthal, owned a property in the village, but, in 1869, he sold it to Jacob Friesen, who immediately sold half to Cornelius Kroeker, Jr. (MHA Waisenamt: 4 *Schuldbuch*, Box 1, Type 4, File 2, images 0269, 0274, and 0321).

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of Johann Bergmann do not match any of the over 1,000 men of Mennonite background who have been tested so far. This is consistent with a father who was a Lutheran, not a Mennonite.

Part 3 will provide more examples of the use of DNA testing and existing records in investigating illegitimate births in Mennonite genealogy. See the December 2021 issue.

Endnotes

1. This information comes from the GRANDMA "GM" database. More information on the GRANDMA database can be found at: <https://www.grandmaonline.org/gmolstore/pc/Overview-d1.htm>

2. Peter Rempel, *Mennonite Migration to Russia: 1788–1828* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2007).

3. http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/First_Mennonite_Settlers_in_Chortitz.pdf

4. http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitz_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_1795.pdf

5. <http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/schoen2.htm>

6. Diary of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe of the Elbing-Ellerwald congregation.

7. Elbing-Ellerwald Baptisms: http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Elbing-Ellerwald_Baptisms_1778-1795.htm

8. Rosenort, Gross Werder Baptisms: http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Rosenort_Baptisms_1782-1795.htm

9. The 1835 Molotschna Census. For an index, see <http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/1835cens.htm>

10. See the front page of the Mennonite church register of Ladekopp, West Prussia. A scan can be found at: https://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/cong_306/4-5.jpg

11. For a transcription of the 1776 census of Mennonites in West Prussia, see http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1776_West_Prussia_Census.pdf

12. Evangelical Church Records of Stuhm, West Prussia.

13. Evangelical Church Records of Tiegenhof, West Prussia.

14. Mennonite Church Records of Orloffersfeld, West Prussia.

15. See <https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/OrloffersfeldeImmigration.html>

16. Mennonite Church Records of Tiegenhagen, West Prussia.

17. Karen Bergmann, *The Bergmann Family History* (Winnipeg 1990).

18. Evangelical Church Records of Steegen, West Prussia.



Diary of Johannes D. Dyck, 1871–1898, preserved at MHA, vol. 4818. Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz.

19. Their immigration documents can be found in the Odessa Archives collection (Fond 6 Opis 1 Delo 5805), available at the Mennonite Heritage Archives.

A New Look at an Old Diary

(cont'd from p. 6)

GRANDMA additions

In Johannes's diary (pictured above), it was not uncommon to read about the death and funeral of a community member, as well as marriage engagements, which resulted in community rituals. The birth of grandchildren, the celebration of family birthdays, and the celebration of the birthdays of others are all the type of events that this diarist often included. When people could be identified in the GRANDMA data base, then these events got documented and added to the genealogical record in GRANDMA.

New and renewed friendships

It was in mid-August 2020 that MHA archivist Conrad Stoesz asked me if I might want to create an English translation of the Johannes Dietrich Dyck diary, which had recently been transcribed from the old German Sütterlin by Willi Frese of Germany. I was offered an MS Word file plus scans of the original text, and I was free to use online translation software for assistance. It was just what I needed, given all my extra time at home during the pandemic.

As I progressed with the translation, I realized that there were occasional omissions or errors in the transcription, or there were additional comments of interpretation that I could footnote. So, I was

in effect editing the German transcription and creating an English translation. This meant that I would eventually need to consult with Willi Frese, whom I had only e-mailed once before. Soon I was having almost daily exchanges with Willi, and I came to appreciate him as a like-minded family historian.

I also discovered, after I had accepted the project from Conrad, that the archives had provided Willi with the scans of the diary in exchange for his German transcription. The archives had also agreed to provide an English translation for Willi, if one was produced. But why did Willi, a German speaker, want an English version? Answer: in his research, Willi had discovered D. Frederick Dyck in Missouri, a connection to a Dyck relative that had been a big breakthrough for his research. He wanted to provide Frederick with an English copy as a gift.

This development brought to memory the first time I received a letter from D. Frederick Dyck while working at the Mennonite Heritage Archives. I had fond memories of his interesting letters and later also appreciated seeing his articles published in *Mennonite Family History* magazine. This prompted me to write him a letter again, after many years, and renew that contact. I cherish these new and renewed relationships.

Taking a new look at an old diary has been a rich experience for me.

Alf Redekopp worked at the Mennonite Heritage Archives from 1994 to 2013. He retired to St. Catharines, Ontario, and

continues to volunteer as a contributor/ editor with several Mennonite research websites (GAMEO, GRanDMA, and MAID), as well as with the MHA in Winnipeg. Alf's work on this diary can be found on the MHA website at <https://www.mharchives.ca/publications/>.

Shaftesbury Campus at 100

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Then, in 2000, the building was recognized as a provincial heritage site and purchased by the new Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), an amalgam of Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Concord College, and Menno Simons College. Significant building renovations were undertaken. Combined with the former Canadian Mennonite Bible College campus across the street, CMU now has 742 students who continue the educational legacy of this 100-year-old building.

Endnote

David Voth (1923–2009) of Steinbach attended the Winnipeg Normal School (Teachers' College) at the Shaftesbury campus in preparation for his career as a teacher in the Steinbach area. He was also an avid photographer and pilot. To view some of his photos, including the 88 related to his student days at the Shaftesbury campus, 1948–1949, see <https://archives.mhsc.ca/index.php/david-voth-photograph-collection-5>. At the right are four of David's photos from his collection. Clockwise, starting at the top, are images 15, 22, 1, and 8. The image at the bottom is an aerial shot of the campus. Note the dormitory bunkhouses where David and his classmates lived during their year of studies.

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- Clifton F. Carbin, *Deaf Heritage In Canada*, McGraw-Hill Ryerson Trade, 1996.
- Natasha Neustaedter Barg, "If the walls could talk, what stories would they share?" Canadian Mennonite University, <https://mycmulife.cmu.ca/2021/01/07/if-the-walls-could-talk-what-stories-would-they-share-natasha-neustaedter-barg/>.



Book Reviews, continued

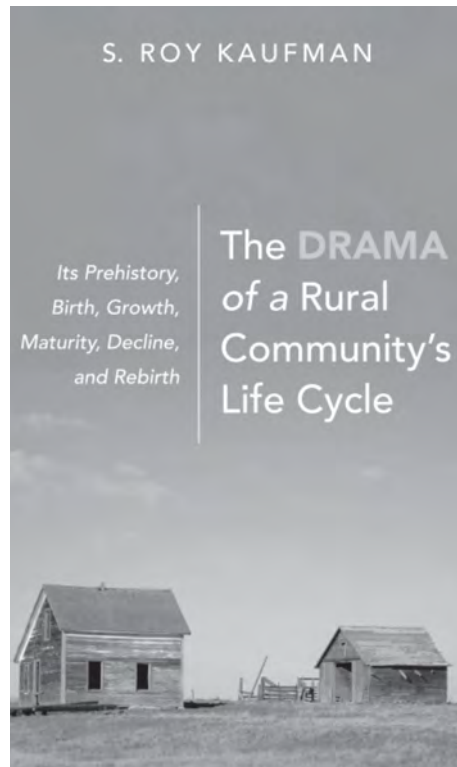
S. Roy Kaufman, *The Drama of a Rural Community's Life Cycle: Its Prehistory, Birth, Growth, Maturity, Decline and Rebirth* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2020), 277 pp.

Reviewed by Royden Loewen, Winnipeg

The meaty title of the book tells it all; indeed, it offers its very outline. But, as such, it also misses the opportunity of announcing that this book sets out to analyze the history of the Mennonite community of Freeman, South Dakota, and in particular the rural sections in Hutchinson and Turner Counties around it. And yet, the title is appropriate as this is not really a comprehensive history of Freeman. Indeed, this book is more of a Wendel Berry-inspired sermon in six parts, the first two sections pointing to a golden era of a utopian agrarian society, the middle sections speaking of environmental and social sin, and the latter section speaking of redemption, that is, “revitalization” and agrarian “re-formation.”

At the very outset, Kaufman acknowledges that, while he is a native son of Freeman and personally steeped in its history and social matrix, he is not trained in history or sociology but in theology, having served as pastor of five different Freeman Mennonite churches. His motivation in writing this book arises from the fact that in each of his five tenures as country cleric, a total of 40 years of service, his church declined in numbers. And the reason was simple: rural depopulation, arising as a simple agrarian purity of the past acquiesced to an industrial agriculture of the present.

In the process, we learn a great deal about the history of the Freeman Mennonites. Hutchinson and Turner counties are located on the ancestral territory of the ancient Arikara agriculturalists and more recent Dakota-Siouan nomadic hunters, on open prairie home, “a world of beauty and peace,” (p.11) a robust grassland on Miocene and Holocene geological formation. The Freeman Anabaptist settlers, like the 1870s Mennonite, Amish, and Hutterian newcomers in other parts of the North American interior, were similar in some respects, all victims of Russia’s integrative reforms, undermining basic values, including those of separate society



and pacifism. And yet, it too was highly heterogenous, including Low German Mennonite settlers from Molotschna, Swiss-descendent Volhynian Mennonites, and the Prairieluet Hutterite-descendants. We learn a great deal about their separate migrations, early church history, and settlement process. The minutia of detail even takes us to the debate on the story of Freeman’s naming: not, apparently, the result of illiterate railroad workers switching town signs; another myth felled by fact!

And yet Kaufman does relatively little primary research. There are few direct references to standard archival sources such as letters, diaries, memoir, tax records. In their stead, there is a substantive synthesis from a variety of general Mennonite and local, congregation, and family histories. In making his case that Freeman suffered a socially unhealthy transition from its agrarian foundation, Kaufman does rely on census records indicating the rural decline, but the qualitative part of the argument rests on his own memories as a Freeman youth in the 1950s and ’60s. He still recalls the balanced, nature-based, farm household, based on a mix of commodities, geared to the communitarian wholeness of his youth. Similarly, his blueprint for rural redemption arises from his observations of hopeful signs among his parishioners—

including organic agriculture, Community Shared Agricultural (CSA) units, bison raising, farmers’ markets. They are also based on his own participation in renewal movements, including organizing rural walks, public addresses, etc.

In sum, this book left me longing for more empirical data, especially on Freeman’s transition from communitarian agriculture to industrial farming. Kaufman argues that the farmers who participated in this transition should not be blamed but seen as thoughtful, kind, hard-working people. Indeed, Kaufman takes the fall, blaming folks like himself, the religious leaders, for deemphasizing creation care, communitarian wholeness, and an inclusive peace. But we learn relatively little of the process by which the farmers accepted chemicalized farming, enlarged their farms, embraced genetic technologies, exchanged small farms for town life, and gave but lip service to conservation. There is even relatively little church history here—sermons, schisms, servants—a surprise given the rich ecclesiastical history of this community.

Certainly, the book offers much to ponder and is a testimony to a rural pastor who has steeped himself in the rich secondary literature—environmental history, world imperial history, US history, ecology, sociology, and theology—to make his case. The book is very well written, highly accessible, exceptionally well contextualized, and rigorously argued from the get-go. As a fulsome sermon, it is rooted in historical context, theologically grounded, and profoundly evocative. At every turn, Kaufman is the informed and committed pastor. The rebirth of agrarian society, he writes, is dependent on religion, the incarnate-based Christianity in particular, but any “traditional religion” that acknowledges a monotheistic Creator God “active and present in the land” (p.17) and that values communitarian wholeness will do. This message and not a general history of Freeman is at the core of the book. As such, I have no quarrel with that meaty title.

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