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Mennonite Historian

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Jacob A. Rempel family. l-r: Eleonore, mother Sophie holding Peter, father Jacob holding Paul, and Alexander. Rempel was the Chair of the *Kommission für kirchliche Angelegheiten* and was instrumental in the last appeals of Mennonites to Soviet authorities in the 1920s seeking to maintain their religious freedom. Photo Credit: MHC 290-1.

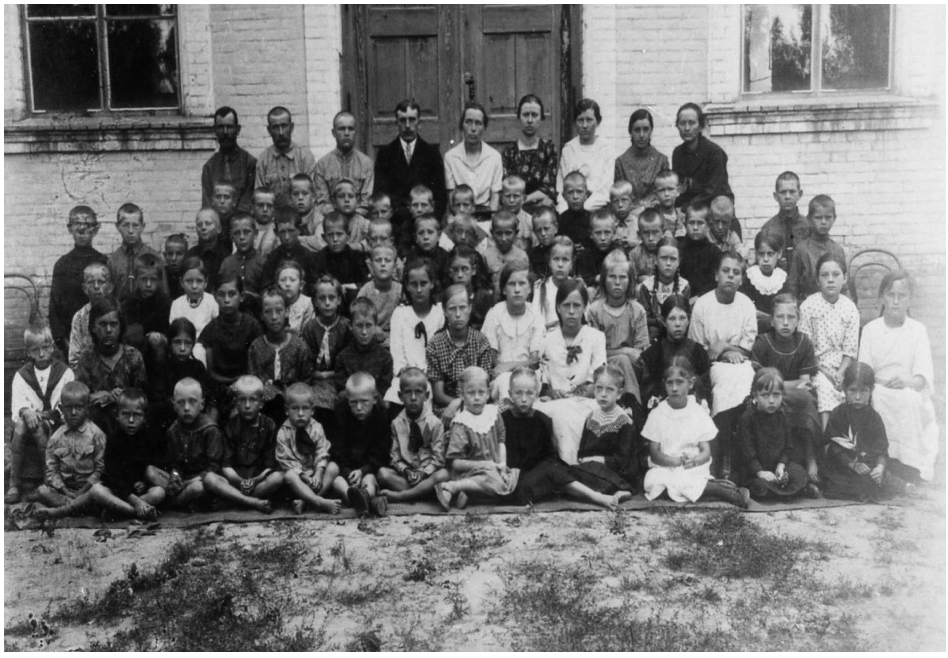
Contents

The Last Appeals by Mennonite Conferences to the Soviet Governments (1923 to 1927)

by Peter Rempel

In January 1925 in Moscow the delegates at a General Conference (*Bundeskonferenz*) of the Mennonite Churches of Russia[1] declared eight points to be the minimum conditions for the ongoing existence of the Mennonites as a religious community in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics:

1. unrestricted religious gatherings and discussions for old and young in churches and private houses;
2. conducting various special religious gatherings, choirs, instruction in religion and faith teachings for children and youth in the aforementioned spaces;
3. the establishment of Mennonite children's homes with Christian education;
4. not imposing special taxes on houses of prayer and church leaders and the permission to build new houses of prayer;
5. relieving the lack of books in our churches so that these are supplied with Bibles, tracts, learning aids, as well as Christian literature generally, not excluding periodicals;
6. conducting Bible courses for the preparation and strengthening of our servants of God's Word;
7. recognizing the school as a neutral space, neither religious nor anti-religious, exclusively for knowledge. Furthermore, teachers should refrain from any propaganda and in their free time control their private lives;
8. implementing the exemption of Mennonites from military service and from military exercises by replacing the same with a service useful to the state. On the basis of the same religious convictions, changing the oath and confirming the loyalty to serve by a simple promise.[2]



A large Sunday School class in Russia. One of the main conditions for Mennonites to stay in the Soviet Union that came out of the 1925 conference was the freedom to conduct religious gatherings and teach their children in the faith. Photo credit MHC 629-S-65.

The formulation of these points was initiated at a General Conference held on October 11 and 12, 1922 in the Chortitza Colony as a memorandum to the Ukrainian Central Executive Committee.[3] This general conference, though without representatives from the Mennonite churches in eastern and northern Russia, elected a four-member Commission for Church Affairs (*Kommission für kirchliche Angelegheiten*), adopting the name of a defunct predecessor entity, and consisting of Bishops Johann P. Klassen and Jacob A. Rempel, minister Jacob H. Janzen, and H. Wiebe. The functions assigned to the Commission included representing the churches to the government along with implementing the resolutions of the conference and maintaining the connections between the individual churches.

Three members of the Commission met in November, another set of three met on Decembr 15, 1922, three members and a proxy met on February 16, 1923, and another meeting was scheduled for April 20, 1923 but was cancelled. At these meetings the Commission members considered various organizational and internal church matters, including the pastoral care of the young men drafted into state service, the visitation of the dispersed churches, the funding of the Commission by the churches, and the planning of the next general conference. However, the efforts of the Commission faltered due to the emigration of Bishop Johann Klassen in July, and inactivity of another member due to illness or employment pressures.

After a consultation of church leaders at the beginning of October 1923, two representatives were sent to Kharkov to ask the Ukrainian Soviet government about the "possibilities for the churches to conduct a religious life according to their convictions, practices and history." In Kharkov they were joined by two representatives, H. Goossen and A. Dyck from the Molotschna colony, and Bishop J. Paetkau from the Memrik colony, thereby broadening the representation to churches in all areas of Ukraine.

On Octobter 14, 1923 three bishops (Heinrich Epp, Jacob Rempel, and A.

(cont'd on p. 4)

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Editors: Hans Werner
Conrad Stoesz

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

500 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, MB R3P 2N2
204.560.1998
cstoesz@mharchives.ca

www.mennonitehistorian.ca

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Mennonite – Hutterite Genealogical Connections through the Centuries Part 2: Russia (1790 – 1875)

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

Introduction.

In 1790 the first Mennonite villages in what was called New Russia, later South Russia and now Ukraine, were founded. Around that time there was little or no interaction between Hutterites and Prussian or Russian Mennonites. In Russia the Hutterites lived in Wischenka until 1802, when they moved to Radichev. At this point the Hutterites came under the care of the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers and were officially classified as Mennonites by the Russian government. This change had important consequences for the Hutterites. First, much of their history from 1801 until 1874 is found in the thousands of pages of Guardianship Committee documents, which have been miraculously saved and are currently in the Odesa and Dnipro Regional Archives in Ukraine.[1] The second consequence was an increase in the interaction between Mennonites and Hutterites. The third consequence was the granting in 1801 of the same privileges given to the Mennonites. The history of Hutterites in Russia has received very little attention from historians. The early (pre-1790 in Europe) and latter (post-1875 in America) periods completely dominate the historical literature on Hutterites.

The Community Split of 1818.

Although there was limited interaction between Mennonites and Hutterites during the first generation of Mennonite presence in Russia, there were no known intermarriages between 1790 and 1818. All this changed in 1818 when, after several years of infighting over private ownership, 30 families, consisting of 143 people, left Radichev and joined the Mennonites at Chortitza as private property owners.[2] The previous Russian census (of 1816) showed that the Hutterite settlement included 242 people.[3] In 1819 almost the entire Radichev village was destroyed by fire. This prompted most of those in Chortitza to return. Those who stayed in Chortitza married Mennonites. Two examples are brothers Matthias Miller (GM#402), who married Maria Giesbrecht of Nieder-Chortitza and Andreas Miller (#401) who married Katharina Lehn.[4]

The Move to Hutterthal – 1844.

In 1843 the development of the new village of Hutterthal, just south-west of the Molotschna Mennonite colony began. In 1844 the entire community moved to Hutterthal. This proximity to the Mennonite colonies led to a significant number of Mennonite-Hutterite intermarriages. In 1844 Wilhelm Martens married the Hutterite Catharina Decker [#514]. She was the granddaughter of the Mennonite Benjamin Decker, who became a Hutterite in 1789 (see part 1). This family was Mennonite, although they lived in Hutterthal from 1857 to 1872, when they moved to the Sagradovka colony. Martens was somewhat famous for living past the age of 100. Maria Pullmann (#937) married Peter Janzen in 1849. They lived in the Mennonite village of Alexanderkrone after that. Leonhard Tschetter (#586), who was married to an Anna Neufeld, moved to Burwalde, in the Chortitza colony in 1848. They had two known sons, Isaak kept the surname Tschetter, while Johann changed his name to the more Mennonite sounding Schroeder. That same year Andreas Wollman (#685) moved from Hutterthal to Rosengart in the Chortitza colony. He married Maria Dyck. According to the 1835 census of the Molotschna colony, his sister, Christina Wollman had an illegitimate son, Peter, with the Mennonite Peter Becker.[5] This son remained in the Hutterite community. Sometime in the early 1840's Zacharias Walter (#833) married the Mennonite Margaretha Dyck. This family remained in Hutterthal and immigrated to the US in 1874 with one of the Hutterite groups.

Peter Entz (#1633) immigrated from Prussia with his widowed mother. In 1846 he married Maria Wipf and moved to Hutterthal. The Entz name still exists within the Hutterite community.

In 1855 Elias Wipf (#912) married the Molotschna Mennonite Agatha Kornelson, who was unrelated to the Knelsen family mentioned in Part 1. This family appears to have lived in Hutterthal for a few years before joining the Mennonite community. They both died in Kansas. The same year Mennonite Daniel Unger married Hutterite Barbara Tschetter (#829). This family lived in the Mennonite village of Waldheim, Molotschna.

Sometime around 1850 Jacob Janzen of Kronsweide, in the Chortitza colony, married the Hutterite Maria Waldner (#1063). This family lived in the Chortitza colony for at least a decade, but appears to have rejoined the Hutterites and immigrated to North Dakota with a Hutterite group. The Janzen name has since died out among the Hutterites.

An interesting case is Paul Stahl (#1415), who remained in Russia after the rest of the Hutterites left for North America. He married Maria Thiessen in 1885 and died in the Barnaul, Siberia settlement in 1917.

Please note that the above list may not be complete. The GRANDMA database includes several other potential marriages between Hutterites and Mennonites in Russia. Unfortunately, the information on these people is incomplete and, in some cases, does not appear to be reliable.

It should be noted that, during the years 1844 to 1874 there were Mennonites who lived in Hutterite villages and Hutterites who lived in the Mennonite colonies. These people did not intermarry or switch religions. An example is Daniel Janzen (#70370), who taught in Hutterthal.

Endnotes

1. For a list of Hutterite files obtained from Ukrainian and Russian archives see: https://www.mharchives.ca/download/2840/.
2. *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*. Vol. 2, p. 612-616.
3. *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren.* Vol. 2, p. 625.
4. For more information on the GRANDMA database information see https://www.grandmaonline.org/gmolstore/pc/Overview-cl 1.htm . For each individual see the sources cited in their GRANDMA database profiles.
5. The 1835 census of the Molotschna colony. https://mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Molotschna_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_1835.pdf.

The Last Appeal

(cont'd from p. 2)

Wall), four ministers (J. Janzen, H. Voth, J. Bartel, and P. Penner), and one teacher (H. Klassen) met in Grünfeld, the main village of the Schlachtin colony, to discuss the issues needing resolution with the government. A memorandum was drafted and then signed by bishops Rempel and Paetkau, and the Molotschna delegates Goossen and Dyck, and presented to the secretary of the Ukrainian Central Executive Committee on October 20, 1923.

The signatories identified themselves as "the authorized representatives of the Mennonites as church communities (*Gemeinden*) in the Ukraine." The opening section described the nature and practices of the "evangelical-Mennonite confession," specifically their principle of never shedding human blood, their refusal of military service, their abstinence from the political support of any state, their baptism of adults and their adherence to the models of the New Testament for their church polity, the autonomy of their individual congregations, their reliance on lay ministers, and the freedom of members to join the church of their choice regardless of location.

On the basis of these traits, the petition asserted that the "evangelical-Mennonite confession" was an entirely democratic entity which was not suffering under the separation of church and state as proclaimed by the new government. Though Mennonites had taught religion to their children in their schools, they could accept the removal of religious instruction from the government schools, if private religious instruction would be permitted. Moreover, "the evangelical-Mennonite confession has no inclination to political influence or rule." This self-description concluded with a firm assertion:

> Under no circumstances can we relinquish the evangelical truths which determine the life of our churches, [and that] of the adults and children. For the nurture and development of our life, we must retain the familiar arrangements and practices. Then we can be honest citizens, solid agriculturalists and punctual taxpayers for the state, and our society will then have a moral youth, free of drunkenness and the illnesses due to the lust of the flesh.

The next section described several government policies and local official actions which were repressing their religious activities but also mentioned in passing several distinctive Mennonite beliefs and practices. Citing the Mennonite practice of baptizing and accepting into church membership only the truly convinced followers of Christ who were knowledgeable about the Mennonite faith teaching, the memorandum objected to the prohibitions against organizing religious instruction of children and youth under 18 years of age in groups such as choirs and against conducting such instructions in church buildings and private houses. Also objectionable were the closures of spaces used for worship in the many communities which did not have church buildings, the prohibition against conducting funerals and weddings in family homes, the restrictions and destruction of religious literature needed by church leaders, the prohibition against church attendance by schoolteachers, and the imposition of standard constitutions on congregations which severely curtailed their religious practices, though some had signed the constitutions and others had not. Finally, the petition indicated that the funds for the expenses of congregations were covered by equal contributions from their members and that only moral persuasion was exerted to collect these. Even so the leader of one church had been arrested when he called upon the congregation for these contributions.

The petition culminated in an eight-point appeal to the government "to permit the unrestricted practice of their ecclesial standards and practices according to their faith." These were the requests later endorsed by the conference in January 1925 in Moscow and cited at the beginning of this essay. The petition concluded with an avowal of trust and hope in the new government installed by the recent revolution:

Alternative Service was an important privilege that Mennonites sought to preserve in their negotiations with the Soviet Government. These four young men, David Klassen, Jacob Siemens, Isaak Rempel, Franz Tiessen, all from Kronsweide pose in the forest where most alternative service took place. Photo Credit: MHC 432-1.0

"Finally, we trust our government, which more than any imperialist government wants to protect the freedom of conscience of its citizens, to take our distress and pain to heart and not to delay the granting of our requests with appropriate decrees."

The response of the Ukrainian Central Executive Committee was received on December 28, 1923. It categorically rejected all requests. The response of the Ukrainian Commissariat for the Interior was received on January 16, 1924. It made some minor concessions on less essential points but left the crucial issues of children's education and state service unresolved though it did disclose some pertinent regulations about the former.

At this time of discouragement over the government's inflexibility and uncertainty about the support of the churches, the Commission was re-invigorated by an authorization of the Nikolaipol congregation, Bishop Rempel's congregation, to continue to work energetically. At least 18 more

congregations added their encouragement, and the Commission resumed its work with enthusiasm. In the next few months Commission members, usually Rempel, visited Kharkov to explain, clarify and press the appeals (February 6-25 and March 11-20, 1924). They could not elicit an official written response from the authorities and received only a verbal indication that "because the question of the religious education of children is so important to you, we do not want to deny it outright, but we can not solve it according to your wishes."

After his March visit to Kharkov, Rempel travelled on to Moscow to assess how to advance the efforts for toleration in the central capital and to communicate more expeditiously with all Mennonite congregations in the U.S.S.R. A meeting of Commission members in Tiege, Molotschna on March 27, with J. Rempel as chairman, J. Janzen as secretary and A. Willms as member, together with several friends, concurred with Rempel's decision to shift the negotiations to Moscow in concert with the representatives from Crimea and Siberia.

Rempel and Janzen arrived in Moscow on April 9 where they met Bishop I. Regehr and minister H. Toews from the Alt-Samara colony and Minister J. Wiebe from Crimea. During their Moscow stay until April 25 they composed a constitution, organizational plans, proposals for the nurture of the congregations, and the draft of a submission to the government. They were not able to meet any government officials but were consoled that their presence in Moscow had forestalled a negative legislative proposal for state service.

Rempel, Janzen, and Wiebe returned to Moscow in May, 1924, staying from the 21st to the 31st. As the churches in Siberia had not been able to complete their deliberations, this trio alone drafted a memorandum to the Central Executive Committee of the U.S.S.R. and presented it to the Commissar for Religious Affairs, General P. G. Smidovich, on May 23, 1924. This new memorandum was probably worded similarly to the memorandum of to the Ukrainian Central Executive Committee dated October 20, 1923.

Commissar Smidovich immediately engaged the Mennonite delegation in conversation about their petition. Indeed, he provided "friendly advice" for clarifying and specifying the requests. For instance, at his suggestion the reason for the religious education of children was added to the second point: "to prepare them for the reception of the sacrament of baptism and the communion of the Holy Trinity." Together they formulated a declaration of loyalty to be spoken by Mennonite draftees:

Question: Do you promise to work honestly and conscientiously for the benefit of the Soviet Republic in the service where you have been placed by the will of the government of the Workers and Peasants, and to follow all the orders from your supervisors, sparing neither effort nor life?

Answer: Yes.

Thereafter Commission members returned to Moscow several times to obtain permission for convening a general conference and establishing a Bible school, and to clarify and press the concerns presented in the memorandum: from July 20-30 and in mid-September it was Jacob Janzen, secretary of the Commission, and from October 16 to November 12 it was chairman Rempel together with Bishop Alexander Ediger of the Schönsee congregation in the Molotschna, and Gerhard J. Reimer, a teacher at the Mennonite Brethren Bible school in Crimea.

By November permission for a general conference and a Bible school were granted by the government, though with the stipulation that the school be located in a provincial city. However, due to the delay the proposed location of the conference was changed from the Mennonite settlement of Davlekanovo in Ufa province to Moscow. It seems they were keen to hold the conference before January 25, 1925, the 400th anniversary of the first baptism of Anabaptists in Zurich. In the follow-up submission on November 6 an urban location for the school was deemed untenable and unaffordable for Mennonites as a "people of the land" (*Landvolk*). On November 10 the representatives modified the request for the right to educate children: requesting that children up to age 12 could attend children's worship services, albeit without systematic religious instruction, and that children over age 12 could attend religious instruction.

On January 1, 1925 Commission members resumed negotiations in Moscow with various government departments as well as made the final preparations for the General Conference to be convened on January 13, 1925. Writing on January 12, Rempel reported that they had not yet received the promised reply from the Central Executive Committee to the memorandum, but it was expected that day. He articulated a stance should the reply be negative: "It will still be important to us that Mennonites remained true to their convictions. We do not cease pleading; we do not lose the trust in God who will reveal his love for us in his time through the government."

At the outset of the assembly of 73 delegates and the four Commission members, it was unanimously agreed to draft a declaration to the government and three delegates were elected for this task. Then after the chairman of the commission, Bishop Jacob Rempel, read the report on the Commission's work since the previous conference of October 1922, he inquired about the assembly's stance toward the eight points submitted to the government on May 23, 1924 (cited above). Inexplicably the points as read by Rempel and recorded in the minutes do not include the revisions formulated in the preceding negotiations with Soviet government officials, particularly with Commissar Smidovich. In any case, the assembly adopted the following resolution of endorsement:

"The eight points which are named by the K. f. K. [Commission] in the memorandum of May 23, 1924 to the federal Central Executive Committee pertain to the fundamental questions of Mennonite church life (*Gemeindeleben*) and the assembly regards these as the minimum upon whose acceptance or rejection the continued existence of the Mennonites as a religious community depends."

The response of the Central Executive Committee to the requests pertaining to the Bible school, worship services for children, and the drafting of youth into state service was received during the conference and was read to the gathering on its fourth day (January 16). The first two requests were denied and the third was postponed. After discussion it was agreed to formulate a petition to be drafted by Alexander Ediger, bishop of the Schönsee church in Molotschna, and the incoming chairman of the commission, and to be submitted to

(cont'd on p. 7)

Mennonite Heritage Archives

MHA Update

by Conrad Stoesz

MHA Launches Tales from the Mennonite Heritage Archives show Feb 20, 2025

Dan Dyck and Caley Dyck, co-researchers and writers of *Tales from the Mennonite Heritage Archives*. https://www.mharchives.ca/tales-from-the-archives/

A new weekly radio program and podcast produced by the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg is bringing history to life through storytelling.

A team of four people creates each 15-minute episode using information gleaned from archival diaries, documents, and photographs.

Archivist and team leader Conrad Stoesz said, "The program offers an eclectic mix of stories, music, and interviews that are worth sharing and remembering. I believe there's something for everyone in the stories held at the MHA."

Stoesz had already been creating five-minute micro documentaries called *Still Speaking* that were broadcast on Golden West radio stations in southern Manitoba.

In response to positive listener feedback, Golden West offered to support a longer 15-minute format.

People from diverse backgrounds find the MHA indispensable in their work, said Stoesz. They routinely uncover characters and stories in MHA collections that find their way to a wider audience. "Lawyers, novelists, policy makers, journalists, and historians all use the archives. When these stories are shared, we all benefit from what is preserved here," said Stoesz.

Show host, researcher, and writer Dan Dyck voices the program. Dyck has a long-standing interest in the stories that are buried in history. "The idea for Tales was born out of conversations with Conrad starting a number of years ago," said Dyck.

Dyck has previously produced and voiced audio content. "I love to share the riches in stories. Along the way, I get to learn about ordinary people from the past, how they managed the challenges of life in their time, what motivated them, and so on. Once in a while we discover stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things, or unusual events in unexpected places. There's a lot we can learn from the past."

Caley Dyck also researches and writes for the program. The recent History of Art graduate is drawn to the stories that connect with her own Mennonite background. "I love doing historical research, especially when there's a personal connection. It's exciting to explore the stories in the MHA, and to share those stories."

Award of Excellence presented to two Ontario Historians

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada's annual gathering was held at Conrad Grebel University College from January 16 to 18, 2025. A number of committees met on Thursday and Friday in preparation for the AGM on Saturday, January 18th. Society members reported on their work in researching, preserving, and telling Canadian Mennonite stories and shared their successes and challenges in the process. Every year, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada presents its Award of Excellence to a person who has made significant contributions to the advancement of Canadian Mennonite history by way of research, writing, organization, or the dissemination of Mennonite historical knowledge. This year, the award was presented to two worthy recipients:

Linda Huebert Hecht was cited "for her contributions in research, writing, and archival preservation." Through her work, she has furthered understanding of the histories of Mennonites in Canada and of Anabaptist women.

Fred Lichti received his award "for his dedication to Amish history in Canada." Through his volunteerism and work as a pastor, he has represented this history to numerous Amish, Mennonite, and public audiences. He is known as an instigator of, and collaborator on, historical projects. Both recipients thanked the Society for this recognition and spoke of the relationships they had built while working on these projects.

l-r Conrad Stoesz, Linda Huebert Hecht, Fred Lichti

Voices from EMC, EMMC and MB Pasts

EMC

The Northern Fellowship Chapel of Creighton, Saskatchewan, began services in November 1960 with its first worker Arnold Wiebe in 1960. When Mel and Mary Koop arrived in November 1960 and Arnold Wiebe left unexpectedly, Mel Koop became the organizing pastor.

Mel and Mary Koop with their three oldest sons.

Though pastors at NFC were men, the church was periodically pastor-less and lay leadership was almost entirely women. Outreach, community involvement, and a sense of fun were all characteristics of this congregation with things such as curling and turkey shoots among their creative activities.

In 2001, NFC began a pastor-sharing arrangement with the nearby Cornerstone Community Church, a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Flin Flon, Manitoba. Twenty years later they gifted their church building to a charitable organization in the community and officially joined Cornerstone

Mennonite Brethren.

Leo and Hildor Janz were raised in a Mennonite Brethren household in southern Saskatchewan. Their deep-rooted faith led them to Bible school, where their passion

Hildor and Leo Janz singing together at a meeting in Winnipeg, 1962
Photo Credit: Centre for MB Studies, NP149-1-3991

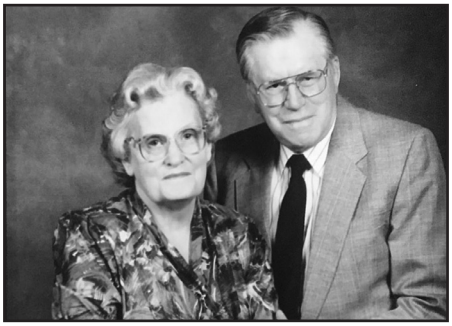
for ministry grew. In 1946, the two brothers, joined by their brother Adolph and brother-in-law Cornelius Enns, formed the Janz Quartet—a gospel music group that ministered throughout western Canada.

By the 1950s, Leo and Hildor had set their sights on a greater mission. Together they founded what would become the renowned Janz Team, an evangelistic organization that took them across Europe and the Americas. Leo became the dynamic preacher, while Hildor's soaring tenor voice became the soul-stirring signature of their crusades, drawing crowds and touching hearts.

After decades of ministry, the brothers retired to Abbotsford, BC, where Leo passed away in 2006 and Hildor in 2007.

EMMC

In the early 1940s, the EMMC (then known as Rudnerweide Gemeinde) began establishing churches in Saskatchewan. A young John D. Friesen was an emerging leader with a special gift for public ministry. By the late 1940s, he was recognized as a gifted evangelist.



John Friesen and his wife Mary

He was ordained as the bishop of the Saskatchewan Rudnerweider Church on October 5, 1952.

As the EMMC grew in number and established churches in new locations, Friesen continued to minister and conduct evangelistic services in the churches in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Belize. His ministry went beyond the EMMC circles. Many people were influenced by his ministry.

John D. Friesen was part of the team that restructured the minister-led Rudnerweider Gemeinde to become the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference.

Search for Renewal: The Story of the Rudnerweider/EMMC 1938-1987, Jack Heppner

(cont'd from p. 5)

the government by the new Commission or the deputies appointed at the outset of the meeting. Ediger's draft petition was read to the assembly on the next day and unanimously approved.[4] On the other hand, the conference had been permitted to launch a bi-monthly publication: *Unser Blatt.*[5]

At the next conference held in Melitopol October 5-9, and opened by Ediger as chair, the Commission first listed what it had not been able to attain in the preceding 20 months: permissions for private religious instruction, Mennonite children's homes, publication of an annual calendar, conductors' course, and itinerant ministers. On the other hand, it could report some advances: ministers had been freed from [excessive] taxation, final permission for a Bible school was still awaited, the distribution of the Bibles imported from Germany, and the release of the most recent draftees from military service, and the release of some previous draftees who had been imprisoned for their non-resistant stance (*Wehrlosigkeit*). Upon Rempel's suggestion the assembly then appointed three members to draft a resolution to the government.[6]

Immediately after the Melitopol conference Ediger travelled to Kharkov and on to Moscow, presumably to deliver this resolution. In Kharkov Ediger was informed by the Commissariat for Interior Affairs that permission for establishing the Bible school in Melitopol had been granted by a special edict effective October 20, 1926.

Ultimately, however, all the requests for freedom in religious practices by these Mennonite conferences were denied by the Soviet governments[8] and most of their attendees were arrested, exiled, and executed, portending the extermination of all Mennonite church entities in the following decades.

Peter Rempel served in various administrative roles in MCC and Mennonite Church Canada. He is now retired and researching several topics in Mennonite history.

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The Last Appeals

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Endnotes

1. "Zur Geschichte der Bundeskonferenz der russländischen Mennonitengemeinden" by D(avid) H. Epp in *Unser Blatt* 2:1 (October 1926) pp. 17-19; 2:2 (November 1926) pp. 39-41 and 2:4 (January 1927) pp. 101-104 provides a survey of the activities of the conference since its inception in 1882. The first two sections were re-published in *Der Bote* 3:44 (3 November 1926) pp. 6-7 and 3:45 (10 November 1926) pp. 6-7. The third section summarizes the deliberations on various major topics at the conferences and illuminates the reasons for establishing a standard confession of faith and a permanent commission, including a coherent representation to the government. The article "Allgemeine Bundeskonferenz der Mennonitengemeinden in Russland" by Cornelius Krahn (1955) in GAMEO https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Allgemeine_Bundeskonferenz_der_Mennonitengemeinden_in_Russland&oldid=169482 is largely based on the article series by Epp.

2. "Protokoll der Bundeskonferenz der Mennonitengemeinden Russland vom 13-18. Januar 1925 in Moskau" in *The Mennonites in Russia from 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents* edited by John B. Toews, pp. 430-431 and in *Mennonitische Rundschau* (1 April 1925) pp. 5-8.

3. "Memorandum an das All-Ukrainische Executiv-Komittee" by J[acob] Rempel et al, October 20 October, 1923 in the Abraham A. Friesen Collection: General Correspondence (January – March 1925) Folder 30 (Mennonite Heritage Center Archives Microfilm 871). The German translation of the memorandum was received at the offices of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization on December 7, 1923. The folder also holds a typescript of the original Russian version verified on February 13, 1924. The following account is based on the reports "Arbeitsbericht der Kommission fuer kirchliche Angelegenheiten vom 12. Oktober, 1922 bis zum 12. Januar, 1925" and "Bericht über die Arbeit der K. f. K. in Moskau vom 16. Oktober bis zum 12. November 1924" signed by Jacob A. Rempel found in the Friesen Collection, Folder 106. The articles by Alexander Rempel: "Kommission für kirchliche Angelegenheiten" in *Mennonitisches Lexikon* Volume II, p. 526 and "Rempel, Jacob" in *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, Volume III, pp. 470-474 also provide summaries and additional details of the formation and work of the Commission.

4. "Protokoll der Bundeskonferenz der Mennonitengemeinden Russland vom 13-18. Januar 1925 in Moskau" in *The Mennonites in Russia from 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, pp. 436-438. The text of this new petition has yet to be recovered.

5. "The Mennonite Periodical, *Unser Blatt* (1925-1928)" by Edward G. Krahn in *Mennonite Historian* 50:2 (June 2024), pp. 6, 9-12.

6. "Protokoll der All-Ukrainischen Konferenz der Vertreter der Mennonitengemeinden in der USSR..." in *Selected Document*s, pp. 440-441.

7. Notice in *Unser Blatt* 2:2 (November 1926), inside front cover. The article "Die Allgemeine Mennonitische Bibelschule" by K. Friedrichsen in *Unser Blatt* 1:11 (August 1926) pp. 280-284 recounts the hopes and decades-long efforts for such a Bible school up to submitting the request to the Soviet governments.

8. "Bericht der KfK von der Altukrainischen [sic] Konferenz in Melitopol im Oktober 1927 [sic] bis zum 1. März 1927" in *Der Bote*, 4 May 1927 p.3 reported the delays and minimal successes on the several requests. .

9. "The Faithful 77: The Second Martyr's Synod – Moscow January 13-18, 1925" presented by Edward G. Krahn and "Soviet Religious Policy and Mennonite Concerns in the 1920s" presented by Johannes Dyck at the *Center for Transnational Mennonite Studies Conference on The Russlaender Mennonites: War, Dislocation, and New Beginnings*, University of Winnipeg, 14-15 July 2023 provide the most recent depictions of this era - available for viewing at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9z9u0KG1Yo&t=17s.

Peter J. Klassen: Reclaiming the Past

by Helene Warkentin

The extent of which current Mennonite authors and poets were influenced by 1920s Russian-Mennonite immigrant-writers, other than Arnold Dyck perhaps, may be unknown; however, with growing appreciation for the creative works of contemporary Mennonites, literature enthusiasts may wish to survey the Russländer Mennonites who continued writing in Canada. Peter J. Klassen was one of them. GAMEO has a succinct entry listing his works and, several years ago, Robert Martens interviewed Klassen family members for an intriguing chapter focused on Peter J. and Liese Klassen in *Windows to a Village: Life Studies of Yarrow Pioneers*. Now available for researchers at the Mennonite Heritage Archives is the family-donated collection of Klassen's journals, correspondence, published work, and photographs that bring a richer understanding of this gifted writer's legacy.[1]

Peter Jacob Klassen was born on his maternal grandparents' farm in Ohrloff, Molotschna, in 1889. When he was four years old, his parents Jacob Peter Klassen (1857-1902) and Agnes Goerz Klassen (1862-1912), daughter of Ältester Abraham and Aganetha Goerz, moved to Spat, Crimea.[2] Here, Peter attended the village school and, according to interviews Martens conducted with Klassen family members, proved himself adventurous when he read about the war in South Africa. Fueled with a desire to help the Afrikaners, 10-year-old Peter and two classmates set out for that country on foot. By the time police found the boys, they were already miles from home.[3]

After graduation from secondary school, a co-educational *Zentralschule,* he attended the business school (*Handelinstitute*) in Simferopol, Crimea; he also earned a teacher's diploma.[4]

Briefly a bookkeeper, then a successful dealer for International Harvester, as well as an inventive farmer, Klassen taught school for about 12 years, first in Ebenfeld in Am Trakt at age 18 in 1907 and later in Arkadak.[5] In 1910, he married Elisabet (Liese) Loewen (1892-1992), born in Baragan, Crimea; her family (Isaac Loewen, 1857-1922, and Agatha Enns Loewen, 1864-1937) had moved to the Am Trakt settlement in 1903. Their marriage was described as "a durable and loving one".[6]

As the turbulence of the Civil War era enveloped the Mennonite world, Klassen served as a counsellor for Mennonites pressed into the army and an intercessory for prisoners. An articulate and gifted leader, he travelled to Moscow in 1922, dangerous but successful trips, to advocate on behalf of fellow Mennonite, Catholic, and Lutheran farmers in the Am Trakt region. He packed two suitcases full of rubles to be used in the consultation process and wrote of repeated threats of facing a firing squad. All the while, he kept a vivid account of events in his journal, unfavourable to the post-Tsarist regime. He was also known for his critical analysis of Russian-Mennonites, a community he deeply loved but whose spiritual inheritance he viewed as dissipating. In 1923, Klassen was elected minister of the Ebenfeld Mennonite Church in Am Trakt.[7]

With the uncertainty of the times and targeted for his outspokenness as a leader and minister, in 1925, Peter with Liese and their 5 children, Peter, Lilly, Arthur, Oscar, and Frieda, emigrated to Canada—to Rosthern, Saskatchewan. Here Klassen worked for the Canadian Board of Colonization (CMBoC), taking on work he found in the area. In 1927, he was asked to supervise and participate in the building the Ebenfeld Mennonite Church near Herschel, SK, where recently arrived Russian-Mennonites were settling.[8] Family photographs show him in December 1927 on the roof of the completed structure, in a headstand.

In January of 1928, the CMBoC requested that he serve as minister for families in the area, and with that, the Klassens moved to the Superb area. Here they were one of 10 families who through the Mennonite Land Settlement Board took up grain farming on the 8½ -section Excel Farms (XL).[9] According to several accounts, Excel Farms was owned by absentee American landlord Herman Hyndman from Chicago, who sold the 26

quarters to the 10 families at $50 dollars per acre, some still unbroken prairie. For each farm, Hyndman supplied horses, cows, chickens, some machinery, a windmill, and all building materials for a house, a barn, two granaries, and an outhouse; he hired a manager and two carpenters for the construction. The families worked together until all the acreage was tillable.[10] While farming three quarter-sections amid the challenges of drought, soil-eroding winds, and the Dirty-Thirties economy, Klassen invented farm implements including a lathe, a plough hitch, and a grain auger, "mostly practical inventions fashioned for reasons of necessity. The family was deeply impoverished".[11] Growing sons and daughters were much involved with the farm work, as Klassen's journals indicate, and five more children were born to them: Elsie, Eleanor, Rudy, William, and Agnes Hedy. Of Peter and Liese's 11 children, two died at a young age.

Peter Klassen nailing shingles.
Photo Credit: MHA 766-014

In addition to recording details in his journals of farm work planned and completed, cattle and crop production, and church services held in their home, most often followed by meals for everyone that Liese prepared, Klassen continued to write his insightful and often humourous poetry, skits, and stories in German and Plautdietsch for adults, youths, and children, for publication in German-language periodicals. However, his earnings from his extensive writing were minimal.

An idealist and independent thinker, an avid reader and prolific writer, Klassen had earlier chosen the Latin pen name Quidam, meaning anyone or a specific one.[12] He signed his articles in *Der Bote* as "Peter Quidam". During the long, cold prairie winters, Klassen authored at least six novels, described by Mennonite literary critics as remarkable, significant, exciting, edifying, and imbued with "a poignantly realistic sadness"…"dramatically told."[13] Robert Martens's chapter title itself refers to the Mennonites whom Klassen viewed as having "abandoned their roots…, squandered [their] spiritual inheritance"; this was Klassen's underlying theme in his stories.[14]

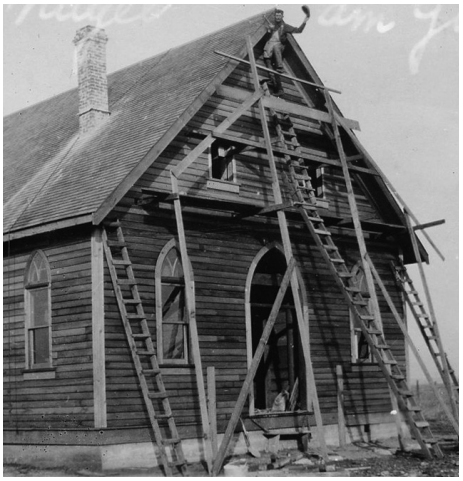
Klassen was among several Mennonites in Canada with whom Dr. Watson Kirkconnell of Acadia University, NS, corresponded. For the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Kirkconnell surveyed Canadian literature published in languages other than English and French. It is interesting to note that in their courteous correspondence between 1938 and 1951, Kirkconnell writes in English and Klassen in German.[15]

When not writing, Peter spent many winter evenings on the farm reading to Liese and their children from an eclectic array of authors.[16] As the collection at MHA shows, he also kept up a steady correspondence with David Toews and B.B. Janz, and writers such as J.H. Janzen, Arnold Dyck, Abram J. Friesen, poet Gerhard Loewen, and others. From 1928, Klassen served as minister and choir director in the church he helped build, as well as the Herschel and the Superb Mennonite congregations in the Ebenfeld Gemeinde until his retirement due to his chronic ill-health in 1948, when he with his family sold their farm and moved to Yarrow, BC.

In Yarrow, Klassen focused on his creative writing and occasionally delivered sermons in the United Mennonite Church, in addition to running the bookstore he purchased: Klassen's Book and Variety Store. This business venture's initial success faltered as membership in local Mennonite churches decreased and their high school closed. A small raspberry patch in the Klassens' yard and his novel sales added minimally to his and Liese's income. Klassen had self-published most of his plays, short stories, and novels (*Als die Heimat zur Fremde geworden…, Großmutters Schatz, Heimat einmal*, *Die Heimfahrt*, and more) during his farming years before relocating to Yarrow. He continued to pen his stories for children, his children's series *Der Peet*, and others, while working on his most successful novel: *Verlorene Söhne* (*Lost Sons*). He had written a form of the novel previously, published as a series in periodicals. In it, he advanced peace ideologies and celebrated his beloved Mennonite community and its spiritual heritage.[17]

The Conference of Mennonites in Canada published 5000 copies of his *Verlorene Söhne* in 1951, and the *Mennonitische Post* republished *Die Geschichte des Ohm Klaas* in 1986. For his creative literary efforts, Klassen was acclaimed in his Yarrow community,[18] by the many readers of *Der Bote, Der Kinderbote, Mennonitische Rundschau,* and *Mennonitische Warte*, by church youth groups that presented his Low-German plays, and by those who heard his poems at weddings and anniversaries; they recognized the value of his excellent stories.

In January 1953, Klassen suffered a stroke that affected his writing hand. After months of recovery at home and a gradual return to better health, he suffered a severe stroke while in his garden and died that



The final nail in the Ebenfeld Church.
Photo Credit: MHA 766-027

Peter J. Klassen

(cont'd from p. 3)

summer on July 19 at the age of 64. In the obituary Liese wrote for *Der Bote*, she lovingly described Peter's final days and his dream he related to her just before his stroke.[19] Liese bore through years of grief and loneliness but maintained her independence and interests, eventually moving to the Menno Home in Abbotsford. Liese died on January 17, 1992, at the age of 99½.[20]

Peter and Liese were among the thousands of Mennonites who immigrated to Canada in the 1920s, caught up in historic upheavals that shifted their imagined futures. These were the teachers, writers, leaders, ministers, graduates, administrators, and factory owners, fluent in Plautdietsch, German, and Russian, but not in English. Canada's requirement of taking up farming, and the needs of family amid a floundering 1930s economy, fragmented many initial dreams. Grateful for their new home, several wrote of their experiences and insights, often in creative form. Translated into English, their narratives and poetry could certainly extend contemporary views of Mennonite hisory and, imaginably, introduce a way to reclaim a people's spiritual inheritance.

Helene Warkentin is a volunteer at MHA.

Endnotes

1. See Volumes 4910, 4811, 6002, and 6003, as well as photo collection No. 766 at the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg.
2. GRanDMA.
3. Robert Martens, "Peter Klassen: A Squandered Inheritance", in Martens, Robert, Maryanne Tjart Janzen, and Harvey Wiebe, ed. *Windows to a Village: Life Studies of Yarrow Pioneers*. (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2007), 302.
4. Martens, 302-303.
5. Martens, 303-307.
6. Martens, 302.
7. Martens, 305-307.
8. Martens, 307-308.
9. Krahn, Cornelius and Richard D. Thiessen. "Klassen, Peter J. (1889-1953)." Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. June 2014. Web. 14 Jan. 2025. https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Klassen,_Peter_J._(1889-1953)&oldid=143050.
10. Superb & District History Committee. *Prairie Tapestry: A Superb Story*. (Kerrobert, SK: Superb & District History Committee, 1981). See articles by Gertrude Sawatzky, Katie Klassen, and Louise Wiens, pp. 34-36.
11. Martens, 310.
12. Krahn and Thiessen, GAMEO.
13 Martens, 309, 313-314.
14 Martens, 301-302.
15. See the *Canadian Encyclopedia* online for more about Kirkconnell.
16 Martens, 309.
17 Martens, 316-318.
18 Martens, 316.
19 *Der Bote*, 19 August 1953, 6.
20 Martens, 319.

In Memoriam

by Peter Letkemann

Susanne (Peters) Isaak died in Meckenheim, Germany on December 29, 2024 at the age of 97. The funeral service was held on Monday, January 13, 2025 in the funeral hall at the Waldfriedhof in Meckenheim-Merl. She was born on March 28, 1927 as the tenth child of Peter David Peters and his wife Katharina Aron Rempel in the Mennonite village Zentral, founded in 1908 in the Voronezh region of Central Russia.

On 20 October 1941 all the German inhabitants of Zentral were loaded onto horse-drawn carts and transported 30 km north to the railway station in Novokhopiorsk. Here they were loaded into freight or cattle cars and transported via Balashov and Chelyabinsk to the station of Tatarskaia, located in the steppes of Siberia between Omsk and Novosibirsk. The train journey lasted 22 days and she could not understand why her family, and all the German-Mennonite villagers were being subjected to such inhumane treatment. At that time, she vowed to "remember" and to tell the story of her beloved Zentral, provided that she herself survived.

She did survive and 55 years later published her history of the Zentral settlement from its founding in 1908 to its end in 1941: *Das Dorf Zentral, Unser plattdeutscher Heimatort im Gebiet Woronjesh/Russland* (Selbstverlag, Meckenheim, 1996).

During the 26 years that she lived and worked in Siberia she was in constant contact with other women (and a few men) from Zentral who had been "conscripted" into the *Trudarmia* and forced to work in the coal mines of Prokopievsk. She shared some of their personal experiences and stories in her second book: *Nach Sibirien vertrieben. Als Beilage zum Heimatbuch "Das Dorf Zentral gedacht"* (Selbstverlag, Meckenheim, 1999). The book was intended as a supplement to her Zentral book and included additional information on the village inhabitants, as well as "corrections" of errors in the book.

In 1956 Susanne Peters married Peter Isaak, who worked as a mine surveyor in Prokopievsk; together they raised a family of two sons and one daughter. In 1967, she took on a position as head nurse in a Polyclinic in the town Shakhty, and the family moved out of Siberia to the region of the port city Rostov-on-Don in southern Russia. Ten years later they were finally able to emigrate to Germany.

In the 1970s Susanne Isaak began to write her memoirs in German and wrote about seven or eight chapters, but felt that her German was not yet good enough. Then she read somewhere that Alexander Solzhenitsyn, living in New England at the time, was looking for material for a

Susanne (Peters) Isaac (1927-2024)

Photo Credit: Peter Letkemann

history of the Soviet era. She wrote and received six letters from him and his assistants, and in 1981 she sent him her 585-page Russian typescript entitled "The Outcasts." She noted that she "wrote from her heart" and needed to get all of her bad experiences and emotions off of her chest. She wrote the manuscript using "fake" names because, in case Solzhenitsyn would publish part of the manuscript, she did not want her real relatives and friends mentioned in the memoir (many of them still living in the USSR at that time) to suffer any consequences. Nothing came of the manuscript, as far as she knew; Solzhenitsyn probably deposited it in his library but never published anything further on his projected history.

Frau Isaak then sent her Russian typescript to Johann Kampen, editor of *Volk auf dem Weg* (VadW). He translated and edited part of the memoir and published excerpts in VadW in the late

1970s and early 1980s. The opening pages of her typescript (pp. 1-6), were published under her name as "Mein Heimatdorf" in VadW, December 1978, 1-2. Later parts of the typescript were published in 1984-85 under the pseudonym Eleonore Mut, again out of fear that the KGB might harm relatives still living in the USSR.

After George Epp's death in 1997 I inherited his copy of the Zentral book, together with the correspondence he had with Frau Isaak. I continued the correspondence and requested her assistance with my own research on "Mennonite Victims of Terror and Repression in the Soviet Union." In response to one of my first letters she sent me a 57-page hand-written reply to my questions! In later years she was also of great help in the preparation of my own book: *A Book of Remembrance. Mennonites in Arkadak and Zentral, 1908-1941* (Old Oak Publishing, 2016).

I met Frau Isaak personally for the first time in November 2000 in Meckenheim and visited her regularly on an annual basis until November 2019. During our many conversations I was deeply moved by the suffering that she and her fellow villagers had endured. I was also impressed not only by her extensive knowledge of the period but also by her wonderful hospitality. After enjoying a bowl or two of her borscht we conversed for at least one-and-a-half hours or more. She answered my many questions. and reported on her recent contacts with members of the Zentral community

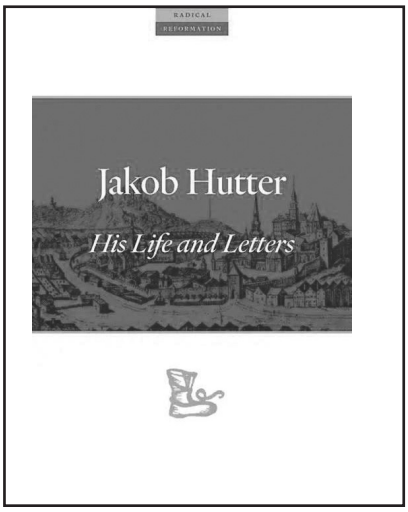
About 2013 my son Joel and I helped her to design and prepare her third book: *Die Familie Aron Rempel* (Selbstverlag, Meckenheim). It was a genealogical/ pictorial history of the Aron Rempel family of which her mother was a descendant. Part II of the book (pp. 65-93) was entitled "Mein Leben in der alten Heimat." On pages 70-75 she recalled the years of her life in exile from Zentral (1941-1977) until they were finally able to emigrate to Germany in 1977. The rest of this part II contains dozens of photographs of family and friends from 1927 to 1977.

As Frau Isaak grew older and became weaker it became evident that she would eventually have to move out of her apartment into a local seniors home. In 2016 she asked whether I could prepare a detailed catalogue of her materials and eventually deposit them in the *Museum für russlanddeutsche Kulturgeschichte* (Russian Mennonite Archive) in Detmold. She was well acquainted with the staff in Detmold since August 2002, when she was invited to present a public lecture on her life`s experiences ("*Erinnerungen*").

Susanne Isaak's family and friends and acquaintences will miss her very much, but all were glad to hear that she died peacefully and no longer needed to suffer.

Peter Letkemann is an organist and historian living in Winnipeg

Book Reviews



Emmy Barth Maendel and Jonathan Seiling, trans. and eds., ***Jakob Hutter: His Life and Writings*** (Plough Publishing House, 2024), 373 pp.

Reviewed by Andrew Klassen Brown, Winnipeg

This coming January, Anabaptists will mark the 500-year anniversary of the first Anabaptist "re-baptisms" in Zurich in 1525, which will be a time to reflect on the history of the movement and those who have shaped it over the past half millennium. In this spirit, Emmy Barth Maendel hopes that through this book, "the life and witness of Jakob Hutter and his fellow believers might be rediscovered today" (xi). Along with co-editor and translator, Jonathan Seiling, Barth Maendel seeks to tell the story of Jakob Hutter, who is considered the founder of the Hutterian tradition, for leading this group of sixteenth century Anabaptists during a time of crisis and formation through his writings and other primary sources from his time (10). In their book, Maendel and Seiling have collected Hutter's eight extant letters, along with other documents that relate to Jakob and his wife, Katharina, including excerpts from the Hutterite Chronicle, government correspondence, and witness reports, as well as an extensive biography and final chapter on Hutter's death and his legacy. Other than Hutter's letters and the Chronicle excerpts, most of this book's contents are now available in English translation for the first time.

Jakob Hutter: His Life and Writings replaces the 1979 publication of Hutter's letters, *Brotherly Faithfulness: Epistles from a Time of Persecution*, also published by Plough. Beyond a mere replacement or update, however, this book goes far beyond the earlier volume, as the letters have all been newly translated from various codices and includes numerous other sources that concern Hutter. This volume is also the latest contribution to the *Classics of the Radical Reformation* book series, and the first addition since Plough took over the publication of the series in 2019.

As I am not an expert in Hutter's writings or familiar with the particular codices used in developing these translations, I cannot meaningfully comment on the sources or the translation work in this volume. However, this book represents a valuable contribution to the study of sixteenth century Anabaptist-Hutterite history and theology, and I would highly recommend it for any Anabaptist or Church history library or scholar interested in Reformation era primary sources in English translation. My one complaint would be the formatting choice to use endnotes rather than footnotes. While the former may allow for a more uniform page layout and ease in reading, the latter allows the reader to more easily refer to the important information that contributes to the content of the text. In any case, I am grateful to the editors for this wonderful volume, whose translations of Hutter's writings and contextualized commentary allow the reader to experience this significant Anabaptist leader in a way that does not feel dry and dusty, but fresh and vibrant through some fine translation work.

Andrew Klassen Brown serves as the Archivist & Records Manager at Mennonite Central Committee Canada. He is also a PhD Candidate at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam studying sixteenth-century Anabaptist history and theology.

Eduard Friesen, ***Die Gemeinde in Menno II: Unterwegs zu einer neuen Identität 1979 – 2023*** (Geschichtskomitee der Kolonie Menno, 2024), 248 pp.

Reviewed by Titus Guenther, Windsor, Ontario

I concluded my review of Eduard Friesen's earlier book, *Die Gemeinde in Menno…1927-1978,* saying: "This reviewer…would love to see the author wrestling with developments on various levels of colony and church life, including missionary engagements from 1979 to the present." Well, the author has certainly met this reviewer's (and other readers') hope. *Die Gemeinde in Menno II* is explicitly intended as a "continuation" of the first book, "emphasizing the internal, further developmental changes of the Gemeinde during its near 100-year history" (240).

The book divides neatly into two main parts: a) the subdivision after 1978 of the unified greater *Mennogemeinde,* comprising both North Menno and South Menno settlements, into multiple *Lokalgemeinden* (district churches; pp.14-100), and b) the internal and external missionary engagements of the *Mennogemeinde*(n), which had timidly started mission work in 1952 but has since blossomed into many diverse missionary programs and activities (101-245).

The idea of decentralization had actually been raised earlier by Ältester Martin C. Friesen (d. 1968), but its realization only came after receiving significant help from Dr. David Schroeder, Canada, who visited the *Mennogemeinde* for 10 weeks in 1976 (33); the following year, Ältester Abraham S. Wiebe and his wife visited the Schroeders and some Mennonite churches in Canada in order to learn more about how collegial church leadership actually worked (35).

The planners of the subdivision of the *Mennogemeinde* resolved to make every effort to maintain the spiritual unity of the greater Mennogemeinde, which had been forged by "integrating" the Chortitzer, Sommerfelder and Bergthaler church groups coming from Canada during the first 40 years of the colony's existence (cf. Introduction, pp.14-17). While aiming to prevent unhealthy competition between *Lokalgemeinden*, the leaders of the subdivision foresaw and even welcomed "diverse progressiveness" in

areas like youth work, use of musical styles and missionary activity among the Lokalgemeinden going forward (16).

The initial subdivision into eight district churches, though meeting many of its intended objectives, was soon followed by further subdivisions into a total of 16 *Lokalgemeinden* (223) in an attempt to optimise distances to the respective worship centres in the various regions. To maintain a loose connectedness among the district churches, North and South Menno each created an umbrella conference to safeguard the "unity of spirit" by providing support and accompaniment but without impinging on the basic congregational autonomy (83). The conference(s) also serve as the "external relations arm" for the greater Mennogemeinde and the projects, viz. education, health care, social services, etc., which are done in collaboration with the civil colony administration.

The second half of Friesen's book narrates the emergence of this dizzying array of nearby and more distant mission projects, mostly in-country but also abroad. Although the writer's concept of mission favours the "proclamation" dimension (imparting Good News), he clearly sees the "diaconal" or service dimension as part and parcel of mission. In short, the "sending God" has activated a "plethora of initiatives, models, and forms" of missions through entrepreneurs, farmers, ranchers, pastors, teachers, women (numerous sewing circles; a thrift store called "mission store") and children (146).

This, the author notes, is a remarkable course correction in a church whose delegates in 1921 negotiated with Paraguay's government to have the hunter-gatherer Indigenous communities resettled into "reservations" (like Canada had done) from the regions to be settled by immigrant Mennonites. Not only were the aboriginal tribal folks not removed but a symbiotic relationship has developed between immigrants and some half-dozen First Nations over time. Thus, in addition to profound "renewals" in church life and education (reported in Friesen's previous book), this eruption in far-reaching, holistic missionary engagements would constitute the "new identity," a missionary identity, toward which, according to the book's subtitle, the *Mennogemeinde*(n) are evidently moving (124).

In conclusion, Friesen's *Die Gemeinde in Menno II:…1979-2023* offers a valuable record of the continued unfolding of Menno's history over the last 50 years. The story of moving from a fundamental disinterest in mission outreach to its enthusiastic embrace and practice is impressive and inspiring indeed. That said, this reviewer wonders if a shift towards a less "colonial" and more "dialogical" approach to mission might be attempted, one in which the missionary church is open to receiving wisdom that God has imparted to Aboriginal peoples with whom we hope to share the Gospel. Thus, the Enlhet society in the Chaco has a profound tradition of sharing foods and of cultivating and preserving the peace, internally and with neighbours, including new-comer Mennonites, potentially rich dialogue points for justice-and-peace-loving church evangelists.

Furthermore, the ecclesiology shining through the book's discussion of church leadership is inspiring in many ways. However, it is hard not to notice that, although church meetings, formerly reserved for the men (*Bruderschaften*), have over time opened up to include women (*in Gemeindestunden*), women do not yet enjoy voting rights in all district churches. Curiously also the book makes no mention of women pastors in any of the district churches. Women are only hesitantly allowed to participate in some congregational decision-making, but as the strongly Bible-centered *Mennogemeinde*(n) continue enroute towards a "new identity," perhaps they may include women in pastoral leadership before long.

Dr. Titus Guenther, Associate Professor Emeritus, Canadian Mennonite University, is a member of Windsor Mennonite Fellowship in Windsor, Ontario.