
Mennonite Historian

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This is a photo of the church at Rosenort near the Nogat. This building replaced the church where Cornelius Warkentin served as *Ältester*. It was built in 1814 after the previous church, built in 1754 burned down in 1812, three years after his death. *Photo credit: MHA, PP-4-044-671.0*

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The Elder Cornelius Warkentin (1740-1809)

by Johann Peter Wiebe
translated by Peter Rempel

On 20 June 2019, the restored gravestone of Cornelius Warkentin (born 7 December 1740, died 10 January 1809) was erected in the cemetery of the former Prussian Mennonite congregation in Rosenort (Rózewo). Who was this Cornelius Warkentin, and what significance did he have for the Mennonites in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? His gravestone was erected as a grave and memorial stone in the cemetery in Rosenort after his death in 1809. In 1894, on the 100-year anniversary of his journey to the Mennonite settlements in Russia, a memorial service was held at his burial site. A small marble plaque with a dedication and embedded metal copies of the front and back of the gold coin awarded to him by the Russian Tsar in 1804 were affixed to the memorial stone.

The text on the plaque reads:

*In memory of the centenary
of this meritorious man,
who worked for his fellow
believers
in South Russia¹ in 1794
with a warm heart
and self-sacrificing love.
Dedicated in gratitude by the
church congregation in Rosenort*

The 1894 celebration and the gold coin received from the Russian Tsar indicate his importance.

Cornelius Warkentin lived during a period of significant change for Prussian Mennonites. It was at the time of the three partitions of Poland, whereby the independent state of Poland was divided up and annexed by its neighbors (Austria-Hungary, Russia and Prussia). In 1772, at the time of the first partition of Poland, Mennonites outside the area around the city of Danzig (Gdansk), came under Prussian sovereignty. In 1793, at the second partition of Poland, the city also



The broken headstone erected in honour of Cornelius Warkentin after his death in 1809 with the plaque added in 1894. Photo Credit Johann Wiebe

became Prussian.

Mennonites were concerned about the continuation of the privileges that had been granted to them by the Polish kings. Under the Prussian King Frederick II, the continuation of these privileges was initially granted verbally. After much pleading, the Mennonites received the “gracious privilege” in written form in 1780. From 1774 onward, in return for exemption from military service, they had to contribute 5,000 talers annually to the maintenance of the military cadet academy in Kulm (Chełmno).

In 1776, the Prussian administration recorded the Mennonites living in the new provinces in a special list. It was titled the

“Special Consignation of all Mennonite families in West Prussia in 1776. Compiled from information provided by the Mennonite preachers (*Vermahner*) by Intendant Schlemmer.”²² The acquisition by Mennonites of additional land was only possible with official permission.

Under Frederick II, however, Mennonites were able to acquire a number of additional farms.

On 17 August 1786, the tolerant Frederick II died. Under his successor King Frederick William II, who placed greater emphasis on military matters, the situation for Mennonites became less favorable. It became apparent that further restrictions on the acquisition of land would occur. In February 1787, the elder Heinrich Donner and the teacher Cornelius Warkentin traveled to Berlin on behalf of the Mennonite communities to express their concerns about the restrictions on land ownership. They stayed in Berlin for 10 weeks and spared no effort to present their concerns to the relevant authorities; however, they were unsuccessful.

On the contrary, the situation became even more unfavorable. On 30 July 1789, the Prussian king issued the “Mennonite Edict” because Mennonites “failed to fulfill one of the most important duties of loyal subjects, namely the defense of the country.” The edict prevented the spread of these “canton-free” properties, namely properties whose owners were freed from military service. Mennonites were not allowed to acquire any more land from people of other religions. Further land acquisition was only possible if the farms yielded soldiers, an impossibility for Mennonites. Another heavy burden was imposed on Mennonites by the obligation to contribute to the maintenance of the Lutheran (*Evangelische*) churches in the same way as Lutherans. These were substantial payments to a church whose services they did not use.

In 1792 the situation for Prussian Mennonites came to a head. A decree stipulated that the granted freedoms only applied to direct descendants of the property owner. Even if a farm was sold to another Mennonite, the privileges no longer applied. Consequently, Mennonite land ownership was bound to decline.

Once again, four elders, including Cornelius Warkentin, set off for Berlin to seek a change to the decree of 1792. The

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Genealogy and Family History

Church Disciplinary Records as a Family History Source

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

Although Mennonites in Polish-Prussia and South Russia were recognized as a people who rarely got into trouble with the law, they were certainly not saints. This perception has two reasons. First, many moral transgressions and petty misdemeanors, while illegal, were handled within the Mennonite congregations and involved Prussian or Russian authorities only when a serious crime was committed, or when the problem directly involved someone from outside the Mennonite community. Second, the Mennonites generally did indeed live up to the stereotype imaged by the authorities and much of the local population.

Most of those researching Low-German Mennonite family history are unaware of two types of church disciplinary records, which could provide some interesting information on their ancestors. Unfortunately, many researchers rely on family stories which are often inaccurate and very biased.

Congregational Records.

Over 95 percent of all Russian Mennonite church registers have disappeared.¹ Eighty years of diligent searching, even after Russian and Ukrainian archives were opened to researchers from other countries, have yielded very little. None of the surviving records have registers of church discipline.

On the other hand, most West Prussian Mennonite church registers which existed in 1938 have survived the war² and are available online.³ Early (pre-1820s) disciplinary records for four congregations are included. These are Marcushof (Frisian) 1787-1818, Tiegenhagen (Flemish) 1784-1807, Orlofffelder (Frisian) 1772-1809, and Plauschwarren (Frisian, East Prussia) 1773-1825. These have been translated and posted online.⁴

Diaries of Ministers (Lehrer) and Bishops/Elders (Ältesten).

Diaries of Mennonite ministers and bishops also discuss many cases of people who got into trouble with the church.

Two such diaries exist from the Prussian time period: the diary of *Ältester* Gerhard Wiebe (1778-1795)⁵ and the diary of *Ältester* Heinrich Donner (1774-1803)⁶. Wiebe extensively discusses many cases while Donner only a few since he recorded these in a separate (Orlofffelder) church register.

Readers may be more familiar with the published Russian Mennonite diaries of the Chortitza colony ministers David Epp (1837-43)⁷ and his son, Jacob (1851-80)⁸ who later lived in the Judenplan settlement.

Something about the Records.

By far the most common recorded transgressions were those of a sexual nature and ranged from inappropriate flirtations, to openly living with someone while still being married, and extramarital affairs which produced illegitimate children.

In Prussia, relations between unmarried couples was a common issue. In many cases unmarried couples who were intending to marry just could not wait. They were often excommunicated and then readmitted after confessing their sins and would later marry within the church. Some were less fortunate, and an unplanned pregnancy forced an earlier than expected marriage (but only after excommunication and readmission). In some cases, the Mennonite couple had to be married by the Lutheran or Catholic clergy and were only reaccepted into the church after the child was born. Wedding celebrations were an important means through which unmarried young people could mingle and socialize. Non-Mennonite wedding celebrations usually involved a significant amount of alcohol consumption and dancing. Although the latter was forbidden by the Mennonite churches in Prussia, young Mennonites were occasionally in trouble for dancing at weddings.

Extramarital affairs were also a well-known problem. These ranged from a member openly living in sin, sometimes even having illegitimate children, to secret affairs that were difficult for the Mennonite ministry to pin down, as both parties would admit to nothing and only circumstantial evidence was available.

Mentions of sexual assault by members are essentially missing from these sources. I will not speculate as to why this is the

case.

In Polish-Prussia marriage to someone outside the Mennonite faith (*Aussentrau*) was a controversial issue especially during the Prussian era (1772 onwards). Some congregations allowed such a marriage providing the non-Mennonite was willing to become a Mennonite. In such cases, if the husband was a non-Mennonite, the sons were not exempt from military recruitment. It was this condition that caused many of these families to emigrate to Russia and ensure their sons were free of compulsory military service. Some congregations simply excommunicated anyone who married a non-Mennonite. These couples often ended up joining the more lenient Mennonite congregations. The *Aussentrau* issue was very contentious and led to significant hard feelings between individuals and congregations and resulted in the splitting of the Thiensdorf congregation and nearly splitting the Tragheimerweide congregation in the 1780s.

Another common issue was alcohol abuse and public drunkenness. Interestingly, this is only occasionally mentioned in Prussian records but is often mentioned in the diaries of the Chortitza ministers David and Jacob Epp. This was, in part, due to significant cultural differences between the Germanic people of West Prussia and the Russians and Ukrainians of South Russia, when it came to alcohol use. In Prussia Mennonites were very active in distilling spirits and selling alcohol. Many of the villages in which Mennonites lived had their own royal privileges allowing them to brew their own beer and wine. It must be stressed that none of the Prussian Mennonite congregations had any restrictions on their members with respect to the production or selling of alcohol, the ownership of taverns or personal consumption of alcohol. This continued during the first few decades in Russia, but the Mennonite attitude in Russia became more negative over time. The Epp diaries show that heavy alcohol consumption itself was not so much an issue, as was the behaviour of members due to excessive alcohol use, such as neglect of domestic duties or public drunkenness.

Both Prussian and Russian sources show that business and financial dealings also came up. Business dealings between two members of the congregation that took a

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Elder Cornelius Warkentin

(cont'd from p. 2)

journey lasted three months, but this time the elders were successful, albeit only after several years. In a decree dated 24 November 1803, the king ordered: "I will permit that if the land currently in the hands of the Mennonites passes to another [Mennonite], whether through inheritance, marriage, exchange, sale, or will, this new Mennonite owner shall also be exempt from the canton duty for himself and his sons born in wedlock."

In this situation of ever-increasing restrictions, the Russian Empress Catherine II invited Mennonites to settle in South Russia. Many families had no hope of an improvement in conditions in Prussia and accepted the invitation to Russia. On the other hand, after 200 years in Prussia, Mennonites had a strong attachment to this country and sought every possible way to secure their continued existence in Prussia. In 1793 Cornelius Warkentin and Heinrich Donner wrote: "We were very reluctant to let our children go there and would only encourage them to leave their homeland and seek a foreign, unprejudiced monarchy in cases of extreme necessity; we would much rather have been able to form them into diligent citizens in our current homeland."

However, even Cornelius Warkentin saw that the future of Mennonites would be in Russia due to developments in Prussia. On 28 July 1788, a moving farewell service for the emigrants took place in Rosenort. By the end of 1788, 152 families with over 900 souls had already arrived in South Russia. There were no teachers or elders among the emigrants, so baptisms could not take place and communion could not be celebrated. In addition to the difficulties of a new beginning, internal disputes arose. Despite exhortations from the Netherlands to overcome the long-standing separation between Flemish and Frisian Mennonites, both sides stuck to their customs in South Russia.

In 1793, a request for help in resolving these problems was sent to the congregations in West Prussia. At a conference of ministers, elder Cornelius Regier from Heubuden (Stogi) and teacher Cornelius Warkentin were delegated to go to South Russia. The chronicle of the Orloffferfelde congregation reads as

follows:

Anno: 1794. On 14 March Corn. Regier from Heubuden and Corn. Warkentin from Rosenort traveled to Russia. They received a wagon from wagoner Schultz from Danzig, for which they will pay 100 florins, and must also provide the horses and a servant, and pay the servant 100 florins in addition. This was at the expense of the local Flemish communities in order to settle the dispute of the Russian Mennonites. Whether it is worth so much or will be of so much use one cannot say.

On 23 February 1794, they set off after a commissioning service. The journey was made by horse and carriage. On the way along the Vistula River upstream to Warsaw, the carriage was stopped by robbers. Elder (Ohm) Regier jumped out of the carriage and asked them in Polish what they wanted. The robber then put a pistol to his chest and threatened to kill him, but Elder Regier, "emboldened by the Spirit of God," laid his hand on the robber's arm and said, "Friend, you will not do this!" The robber, "struck by the Spirit of God," lowered his pistol, spoke kindly to them, and let them go in peace.

After two months of travel, they reached the first village of the colony on 18 April 1794. The Mennonites in Prussia had given them a mission, which was read aloud at a congregational meeting:

We therefore authorize and send the aforementioned C. Regier and C. Warkentin, as men of experience and good reputation, to our brothers and sisters in faith in Chortitza, Russia, to thoroughly investigate the disputes that have arisen there, to hear complaints and decide on them, to exhort all who are of honest mind to peace and love, to strengthen them in their good will, to comfort the faint-hearted, to rebuke those who err, but to separate from the Lord's congregation for their improvement those who are quarrelsome and do not obey the truth but resist and blaspheme and do wrong.⁴

An immense amount of work had to be done with many discussions, listening to conflicting positions, and deciding on matters. Moreover, the two were also expected to deliver numerous sermons. This strain led to Cornelius Regier falling ill, and he soon died far from home. On

his deathbed, he ordained the teacher Cornelius Warkentin as elder. The new elder succeeded in restoring peace among the settlers. This paved the way for the new settlement to develop in a blessed manner.

P. M. Friesen describes Cornelius Warkentin in his book *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, published in 1911:

He was an impressive and winning personality. He writes, speaks, officiates, and acts before high and low as a man of splendid general and theological training. Not only his fellow believers, but also Lutheran and Catholic clergy, imperial Russian colonial officials, governors, and high-ranking personalities treat him with respectful love. His stay in the Chortitza colonies is an uninterrupted Pentecost for the orphaned settlers.³

On 10 July 1794, Warkentin set off on his return journey to Prussia. In Ekaterinoslav, the capital with the same name as the province where the Mennonite colonies were located, he successfully clarified various matters concerning the settlers with the district government. He also met with the director of commerce to discuss matters concerning the colony.

On the way, he visited Protestant and Catholic colonies and fellowshiped with their leaders. In his notes, Warkentin wrote about his encounter with a Catholic clergyman: "When I parted from him after a long conversation, we both knew that we would meet again one day in the place of joyful eternity and find each other there."

His next destination was the village of Vyshenka, 100 kilometers northeast of Kyiv. The Hutterites had been settled on the land of the Russian nobleman Count Rumyantsev since 1770. Warkentin took part in the evening prayer meetings and was invited to preach. He stayed with the Hutterites for three days and during this time was also invited to conversations with Countess Rumyantsev. "We viewed the features of the castle and also the summer palace, where the monarch Catherine II resided during our passage." After the three-day stay with the Hutterites, the bond of love and mutual trust had grown so strong that almost everyone begged him tearfully to stay longer. Elder Johannes Waldner accompanied him to the next town.

Due to unrest on the Polish-Russian border, Warkentin had to make his return

journey via Riga. In Riga, he had contact with the governor, the mayor, and other distinguished persons of the city. His sermons were heard by listeners from all religious groups, all of whom expressed



A 2010 photograph of the restored gravestone and memorial. Photo Credit: Johann Peter Wiebe.

their satisfaction and showered him with invitations. The governor helped him continue his journey. In Riga, he sold his equipment, and he returned home by ship via Memel and Königsberg in September 1794.

His ordination as an elder in Russia was confirmed in his home congregation, and from 1795 onward, Warkentin took over the office of elder in Rosenort.

The Mennonite colony in South Russia developed so well that Cornelius Warkentin was awarded a gold medal with an honorary letter of commendation by Russian Tsar Alexander I in 1804 in gratitude for his efforts in regulating the affairs of the Mennonite community there.

Cornelius Warkentin was an outstanding figure among the Mennonite elders.

He strove to promote understanding between the Flemish and Frisian branches of the Mennonite community. He was the first Flemish minister to preach in the Frisian congregation in Orloffersfelde.

The Mennonites in Prussia felt themselves to be one people, connected to their Dutch kin and to the Mennonite emigrants in Russia. Warkentin always emphasized this bond. He strove to preserve the privileges that enabled them to live according to their principles. He also strove for peace in the

communities. He was very broad-minded in his theological views, as can be seen from his notes on his trip to Russia. He can be described as a bridge builder and peacemaker between the Flemish and the Frisians, between disputing parties, but also toward people of other faiths.

In contrast to the later Prussian Mennonites, who at the end of the 18th and in the 20th century welcomed the takeover of Polish Prussia by Prussia, Warkentin viewed the beginning of the Prussian era, with its strong emphasis on the military, with great skepticism. He saw no future for the Mennonites in this country.

Cornelius Warkentin died on 10 January 1809. The following sentence was written on his gravestone in his memory:

Near and far, for the good of his fellow believers, actively loving the members of the congregation, this man, whose body rests here, worked. Wandering gently through evil and good rumors, his journey came to an end. Lord, in the light of heaven, reward his spirit with blessed goodness.

I know that my Redeemer lives. Job 19:25

*Memorial
of the Reverend Elder
Cornelius Warkentin
of Rosenort*

*Born on 7 December 1740
Chosen as a teacher in 1775
Chosen as an elder in 1795
Died on 10 January 1809
after having been a teacher for 20 years
and an elder for 14 years
and having reached the age
of 68 years, 1 month, 3 days.*

May his ashes rest in peace.

Endnotes

1. South Russia was the designation by the Russian empire for Ukraine.
2. Available online at: https://mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1776_West_Prussia_Census.pdf
3. Translation from the original German version *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland (1789-1910)*, page 47.
4. Horst Gerlach, ed. *Weltweite Bruderschaft*, 6th ed., (Weierhof, 2010), 123.

Johann Peter Wiebe is chair of the Mennonitischer Arbeitskreis Polen (MAP - Mennonite - Polish Working Group) and leader of its tours of Mennonite sites in Poland. He is retired.

Impressions of Danzig Mennonites

A Worship Service of the Danzig Mennonites in 1694: Excerpt from the travel journal of the theology student, Carl Arnd (1673-1721)¹

Extracted and transcribed by Kurt Kauenhoven

Translation to English by Elfriede Rempel and Glenn Penner²

In the *Baltischen Studien* [*Baltic Studies*] published in Stettin [Szczecin] in 1905, one finds an essay on pages 1 to 54, by Dr. G. Kohlfeldt, with the heading “An academic holiday trip from Rostock to Königsberg in the year 1694.”³ This work is a publication of a handwritten travelogue by the author Carl Arnd, a Rostock theology student and is housed at the Rostock University library. The diary reports on an extended stay in Danzig, and provides a description of a visit to both Mennonite churches that were located there at that time. Since these chronicles provide a picture of the church service, the manner of speaking, and the traditional dress of our Mennonite ancestors in Danzig, they are reproduced in the following excerpt. Dr. K. K.

13) The Mennonite congregation is made up of a gathering, in a house, on the outskirts of the city. [This would be the Frisian church at Neugarten, built in 1638] The singing of hymns was held around the outside of that building, a certain hymn by Ambrosius Lobwasser [1515-1585, *Psalter des Koeniglichen Propheten David*]. Spoken before the sermon: O Lord God we beg of you through Jesus Christ, grant all of us your [Holy] Spirit, etc., in order that we may be redeemed. The *Ordo Sacer s. Ministerium*⁴ [sacred order of the service] is led by seven deacons from various vocations, who were called to [be deacons]. These seven remain standing at the front of the congregation, until the singing before the sermon ends. Thereafter, they seat themselves, one after another, and then one of them arises, and steps onto a small platform to preach. The sermon itself, which was preached by an older

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MHA Update

People ask if visits to the archives “slow down” after the university term is over. The answer is no. From fall to spring the archives welcome many visitors from within Manitoba, including students. However from late April to early September, we continue to be busy hosting researchers from out of province. Classes are done and people travel for research purposes, or to attend conferences. People on holidays coming to Winnipeg or traveling through take time to visit the archives. This spring is no different. In the last week of April, we hosted Sonali Uppal, a PhD candidate, and Johanna Lau, a research assistant, who are supporting the research of Professor Anna Kim at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, and Professor Eun Joo Koo at the University of Lethbridge in Lethbridge, Alberta. Their research explores how social enterprises build organizational resilience and create positive social impact during and after crises, grounded in qualitative field studies of fair trade organizations, such as Mennonite Central Committee’s Ten Thousand Villages Canada project. They said “The archives were tremendously valuable for our research. They gave us a rare opportunity to understand the longer history of Ten Thousand Villages Canada through the conversations, relationships, and organizational decisions preserved across time. We are very grateful to MCC’s Winnipeg Archives for preserving this history and making it accessible to researchers.”

From late April to early May we hosted Dr. Iryna Skubii, a Ukrainian scholar at the University of Melbourne, Australia. She was participating in an international Ukrainian history conference at the University of Manitoba. Her research at the MHA builds on her presentation, “From the Americas to the “Old World” and Back: The Sunflower Plant’s History About Ukraine and Beyond Ukraine.”

January is often grant-writing month and April is often when we get the results. The Mennonite Heritage Archives was

successful in receiving two grants. Sara Dyck has been hired to process archival materials, thanks to the Young Canada Works program, and Baden Gaeke Franz will be digitizing a collection of books and periodicals thanks to the Mennonite Genealogy Inc. grant program. These grant programs are important to MHA to

establish the first Mennonite community in Paraguay, the post-Depression era project to move Mennonites from Saskatchewan to Burns Lake BC, and interviews with author Andrew Unger and archivist Laureen Harder-Gissing of the Mennonite Archives of Ontario. You can listen via podcast platforms such as



Researchers Johanna Lau and Sonali Uppal consulting the MCC Records at the Mennonite Heritage Archives in April 2026. Photo Credit: Conrad Stoesz.

provide greater access to the rich collection of resources collected at the archives. The digitized content will be freely available on our digital platform with a free account at <https://collections.mharchives.ca/>.

In January the MHA welcomed Gerald Ens as an Archival Associate. Gerald is a graduate of CMU and obtained an MA in Religious Studies at McMaster University. Gerald has been working on various history-related projects since 2020 including writing articles for the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. In this new role, Gerald is employed by the D.F. Plett Foundation to help the MHA process materials of interest to the Foundation.

At the end of the university term we said thank you and see you later to CMU student Imani Ndemo and CMU graduate Hannah Friesen. Imani worked on digitizing the last half of the *Der Bote* periodical for our digital collections site and will be returning in the fall. Hannah Friesen did her work integrated learning at the archives and had such a great time she continued to volunteer until her summer job started.

Our podcast continues its weekly schedule with stories about the New York banker Samuel McRoberts who helped

Spotify and Apple Pods casts or on our website:

<https://www.mharchives.ca/tales-from-the-archives/>

Voices from EMC and MB Pasts

Mennonite Brethren

This is a photo of the first Mennonite Brethren missionaries to India, most likely taken between 1899 and 1901. The couple in the back row on the right are Abraham and Marie Friesen. The



Photo Credit CMBS NP028-01-1

Friensens, originally from Russia, arrived in India in 1889 and established the first MB mission to the Telugus of South India. They served in India for 20 years. Today MWC statistics report that there are 12 national Mennonite / Anabaptist churches and denominations with 136,916 members in 958 congregations.

EMC

On September 23, 2001, Steinbach Bible College and Steinbach Christian High School launched an ambitious \$10 million campaign they called “Imagine Tomorrow.” With the goal of relocating, this campaign shifted over time and resulted in the addition of classrooms and office space over the next few years. The original goal of this campaign is being realized in 2026, as construction is underway for a new SBC campus, while Steinbach Christian School (now a K-12 school) assumes its portion of the current campus.

Started in 1931 as a Mennonite Brethren church school, the first building was constructed in 1939 on First Street in Steinbach. A high-school program was added in 1947 and became a permanent part of the school in 1953, leading to a location change as they moved to the current location at the north end of Steinbach in 1955.

In the early 1960s, the Evangelical Mennonite Conference was asked to become one of three organizations that would jointly operate the school. Over the years, partners in the school have changed. Today partners include the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, Christian Mennonite Conference and the Mennonite Brethren who proudly call SBC “our school.”



Platform guests for “Imagine Tomorrow” launch: l-r: Jim Penner, Abe Bergen, Vic Toews, Randy Dueck. Photo Credit: MHA, P-05693.

Impressions of Danzig Mennonites

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merchant with a goatee, was half Dutch and half Low German. The *Votum* took the form of a request or invocation: Let our membership, at the beginning of our service, join together and pray (followed by prayer). The *Praelog Exordium* [prologue, opening] of the sermon began with words from David. God’s grace is greater than our belief. The King and Prophet David has written this to the rapt listeners, etc.

Amplificatio [expounding, development]: How can God’s goodness and kindness be known and magnified, when considering the insignificance of man etc. *Applicatio* [putting into practice]: since we know that, let us look inward, and consider how often we have offended the Almighty God. Let us work hard and exert ourselves, because as merciful as he is, he can also become angry etc. *Applicatio specialis ad textum* [a special application of the text]: Therefore, we want to take to heart several passages of scripture that can teach us, serve as a warning, and comfort us etc. (By the way, many passages were cited from Genesis... etc.) However, we can do nothing of our own volition, apart from the Holy Spirit, etc., as Paul has written to Peter. (This praeparatio [teaching] lasted a quarter of an hour), followed again by prayer. The scripture passage was from Jeremiah’s Lamentations 1:1. “How deserted lies the city, once so full of people ... She who was queen etc.” *Partitio* [intended treatment of the topic]: devout listeners, we want to consider three key points in this scripture passage: 1) what kind of city was she in all her splendour, 2) her devastation, 3) the reasons for her devastation. Holy Communion was served, during which everyone broke bread from the same bowl, and drank from the same vessel. [The elements] were passed (along the row) accompanied by these words: “Remember the suffering of Christ”.

Their unusual attire: Men were dressed in black, with small collars, and short hair. Women were also dressed in black, and heads uncovered, with a small black plume on the back of the hair, etc. Very beautiful girls.

14) [A visit to the Catholic church at Bischoffsberg]

15) The manner of conducting the service was the same in the Mennonite Church in Schottland [This was likely the Flemish church built in 1648 in Schottland, a suburb of Danzig]. (*Conclusio eum voto* [Benediction]: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”) [2 Corinthians 13:14] These people were stricter with regards to the style of their clothing, and therefore the other congregation was more lenient, and fell away from the expected style. These [the Old Flemish] were known as *Finstoff* [fine material—the refined Mennonites], those—No. 13 [the Frisians] were known as the *Dreckwagen* [dirt wagon or garbage wagon; that is, those who would accept anyone]. The origin of the denomination is from the historical tradition of Holland. This is the true story.

Impressions of an English Merchant

From “A Particular Description of the City of Danzig ... by an English merchant”, author unknown, 1734.⁵

Anabaptists. These go generally by the name of Manists [sic], and have their particular religious meeting. They are great traders: like our Quakers, they are singular and persise [sic] in their dress, but always clothed in black; yet in point of good manners and affability, they are very reserve[d], and the quintessence of courtesy.

Endnotes

1. *Mitteilungen des Sippenverbandes der Danziger Mennoniten-Familien Epp, Kauenhowen, Zimmermann*. Jg. [vol.] 3, Aug. 1937, Heft [issue] 4, p. 122-124.

2. The comments in parentheses are those of the author or Kauenhowen. Those in square brackets are those of the translators.

3. The issue of *Baltischen Studien* from which this extract was taken has been digitized. The link below contains the first entry with the second entry on the following page. https://www.digitalbibliothek-mv.de/viewer/image/PPN559838239_NF_9/25/#topDocAnchor

4. Note that, as a Lutheran theology student, Arnd analyzed the church service in terms of a classical liturgy.

5. <https://ia600200.us.archive.org/35/items/particulardescri00engluoft/particulardescri00engluoft.pdf>

ZP30: Voice of the Paraguayan Chaco

by Ruth Konrad

The idea for a radio station in the Paraguayan Chaco was first voiced in 1965 by Frank Kroeker, an EMC missionary working in East Paraguay. In conversation with a missionary colleague working in the Chaco, he was told that the radios that the missionaries had brought in had influenced the Chaco natives, who had listened to communist broadcasts coming out of Cuba, and caused an uprising of one of the tribes against the Mennonites in the area. As Frank tells it, his “immediate and impulsive response” was, “Why not set up a Christian radio?”¹ A radio ministry for

between the Mennonite colonies of the Chaco and the EMC, as well as the required government licenses, and raising over \$150,000 for construction. The Paraguayan government gave authorization for the station with the directive that ZP-30 could “not transmit political, commercial or controversial programming but would be allowed to transmit in the languages of the different ethnic groups and be given complete freedom to present the gospel.” Planning and co-ordination was accomplished by Frank Kroeker. Technical design and equipment installation was the responsibility of engineer Jack Hoepfner of Radio Southern Manitoba.²

Despite setbacks, Radio ZP-30, “The Voice of the Paraguayan Chaco,” went on the air for the first time on September 15, 1975. The dedication service on

Indigenous peoples including Lenguas, Chulupies, and one in the Guaraní language. There were also programs created by Indigenous peoples for their own communities with Mennonite help.⁴ To make the radio station more self-sufficient, Radio Southern Manitoba in Altona hosted and trained Hartmut Isaak of Paraguay for six months in 1981 to become the radio engineer at ZP-30.⁵

At the 10-year mark, in 1985, it was noted the station broadcasted in eight languages and was a “strong integrating force for the numerous ethnic groups in the Chaco. Spanish is the main language, and emphasis is given to Paraguayan national music.” Programming touched on health, economic issues, development, the home, news, and entertainment. It was also a religious station that offered biblical teaching. Locally produced programs were augmented by programs such as *Moody Presents*, *Back to the Bible*, *Mennonite Brethren Communications*,⁶ and *Frohe Botschaft* from Faith and Life Communications in Winnipeg.⁷ The local news service made the station “virtually indispensable” with five daily news bulletins in Spanish and German and four a week in an Indigenous language. In 1985 the station had a staff of 25 people and had fourteen hours of programming daily. Ernie Loewen was the manager, Benny Goertzen the program director, and Hartmut Isaak the director of engineering. By 1986 an outgrowth of ZP-30, “Chaco Radio Mission” was in full swing providing follow-up work for listeners looking for spiritual guidance.⁸

In 1986⁹ an attempt to establish another AM radio station in East Paraguay known as ZP-50 was made. As exploratory work continued, it became clear that this was unlikely to happen easily, EMC missions instead turned to the creation and distribution of short gospel programs to be aired on commercial radio through Ministerio Buenos Nuevos, or MBN. In 1999, the dream for Christian radio in East Paraguay came to fruition with the launch of Radio Mensajero 100.9 FM, which still broadcasts today.

In 1987 a new office building was completed in Filadelfia for the growing radio station. The two-story building measuring 64 square meters and costing about \$20,000 US dollars was dedicated on October 9.



This 1985 photo is of an Indigenous music group singing and playing instruments in the radio ZP-30 studio. Photo Credit: EMC D1980-EMC-F331-P-04673

the Chaco seemed ideal, since the region was vast with few or no roads.

For the next few years, a radio station for the Chaco was on the prayer list. At first, it did not seem to garner much interest, and some of the initial interest fizzled as they faced government regulations and other delays. Slowly, things fell into place, and in 1972, the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) Board of Missions (BOM) was ready to consider tackling the project. The BOM formed the EMC Missions Auxiliary (now Project Builders) to raise funds for the project, and in 1973, they financed a feasibility study.

The next year was spent working out the details—obtaining a signed agreement

November 9, 1975 drew 500 people to the Mennonite Brethren church in Filadelfia. Speakers from the supporting groups included Bishop Abraham S. Wiebe from Menno Colony, Dietrich Klassen of Neuland and chair of the inter-colony ministerial, missionary Gerhardt Hein, Ben Friesen from the Canadian EMC, Menno Colony Oberschultz Jacob Reimer, Venanico Gonzales representing Indigenous peoples, Wilmer Stahl of the Indian Settlement Board, C.P. Loewen from the EMC, and Frank Kroeker station manager. Radio Southern Manitoba also aided in the project.³

By 1977 the station had programs for

September 2025 marked 50 years of ZP-30 being ‘on the air,’ and the radio station continues to boldly share the Word of God alongside news, agricultural updates, educational programming, personal messages, and greetings. Today, native language speakers in Spanish, Guaraní, Enhlet, Nivaclé, Ayoreo, Portuguese, High German and Low German continue to provide programming that is informative, educational and comforting. Abe Giesbrecht, EMC missionary from 1989 to 1994 in Paraguay, represented EMC at the anniversary celebration. In the conclusion of his report on the anniversary



This 1995 photo is of Miguel Angel Florentin in the “on air” studio of Radio ZP 30. Florentin is head of the Spanish Department at ZP30 and host of the “Terere con Musica” program. Photo Credit: MHA 518-251.0

Giesbrecht noted that “ZP-30 continues to be a sweet aroma, somewhat like that jar of honey is a sweet, sacrificial gift, one of many expressions of appreciation from the station’s many listeners in the ever-changing and developing Paraguayan Chaco.”

Endnotes

1. Abe Giesbrecht, “A Sweet aroma,” *The Messenger*, November 18, 2025.
2. “ZP-30 is vital link in Paraguayan Chaco,” *Mennonite Reporter*, October 14, 1985 p. 2.
3. “Chaco radio dedicated,” *Mennonite Reporter*, January 12, 1976, p 2.
4. “ZP-30: The voice of the Chaco,” *Mennonite Reporter*, February 7, 1977, p. 9.
5. “Altona,” *Mennonite Reporter*, June 8, 1981, p. 15.
6. *Mennonite Reporter*, 1985.
7. “Mennonite Radio Programs,” *Mennonite Reporter*, September 30, 1985, p. 148.
8. Frank Kroeker report to EMC Conference Council, July 3, 1993.
9. “Radio Mensajero 100.9 FM is broadcasting!,” *The Messenger*, May 5, 1999, p. 10.
10. “Dedicate new radio building,” *Mennonite Reporter*, December 7, 1987, p. 12.
11. Abe Giesbrecht, “A Sweet aroma,” *The Messenger*, November 18, 2025.

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Rudi and the Russians: October 1945

by Carl Adrian

Author’s Note

This story is based on events my father recounted from his childhood as a Mennonite refugee fleeing Russia in 1945. While I have taken artistic license with dialogue, details, and structure, the core events—the fishing incident, the tank sabotage, and the sudden departure—are drawn from his memories. The castle in Speck and the family’s refugee journey are real.

We had arrived at this abandoned castle in Speck (Shpek), East Germany, only one week ago, but to me, this was the best part of our escape from Russia.

You see, we were Mennonite refugees fleeing to the West, and because of this, we were in constant danger of being caught by the advancing Russian army. If caught, we would be sent to Siberia. That is why we frequently “took up residence” along our escape route. My Oma (grandmother) told me that we were disguised as travelling peasants, but I was five years old and didn’t understand what this meant.

This castle made me forget all this. Here, I was in a new world—separate from the muddy roads, gnawing hunger, stabbing cold, and especially the Russian soldiers. The castle was a magnificent playground. Ivy grew all over the walls and among the millions of flowers that blanketed the lush flowerbeds.

I lived with my Oma and brother, Henry, in the servant quarters, right next to the big, rusty, cast-iron gate.

The moss-carpeted forests exceeded all my wildest dreams of thrills and adventure. To the northwest, there was a round, deep-blue lake. In this lake were millions of cool, wiggly fish. This world, I thought, was surely better than heaven ever could be. I secretly wished with all my heart that we would never, never leave this place.

“Well, today is your birthday, Rudi,”

said Oma; “What would you like to do?”

“Can I go fishing at the lake beyond the Burgermeister’s (mayor’s) place?”

“Definitely not! You are not to fish on Sunday!” she said firmly.

I knew if I pestered Oma, I probably would get a good spanking—and that was the last thing I wanted on my birthday.

Now, I’m usually a very obedient boy, but my “disobedient” brother Henry later convinced me to go fishing anyway. So, that afternoon I told Oma that Henry and I were going out to play. She warned us to stay away from the soldiers. And with that, she kissed us good-bye.

The weather that afternoon was perfect. The moss was cool on our bare feet as we walked through the clean pine forest. The robins were twittering with the swallows, and the bees made their rounds to all the coloured flowers. Yes, today certainly was the best day of my life. Nothing could possibly go wrong.

We took the shortcut along the east end of the lake, close to the Russian tank practice ground. We would have taken our usual west-end route, but then Oma could have spotted us. It was quite exciting to sneak past the sentries by running from tree to tree with our fishing poles gripped tightly in our hands.

Finally, we arrived at our favourite fishing spot. It was just out of sight from the ever-watchful Russians. I unraveled the string from my homemade fishing pole. It



The abandoned manor at Speck in Northern Germany. In 1929 publisher Dr. Kurt Hermann owned the property and had the manor house built as a hunting lodge. It was briefly used by the Soviets as a command office and for housing refugees. Photo Credit: Carl Adrian.

was a short stick with a wine-bottle cork as a bob, and a sharpened bent nail as a hook. It was simple, but boy-oh-boy could it ever catch fish!

(cont’d on p. 10)

Rudi and the Russians

(cont'd from p. 9)

"Look!" I whispered, "there's the Burgermeister's son ... he thinks he's so much better than us with his fancy shoes and nice clothes!"

Although we barely knew this kid, Henry and I were envious of him. We wanted what he had, or at least what we thought he had, and we weren't afraid to cut him down a notch or two—probably to make us feel a little bit better about ourselves.

After all, we were refugees. Nobody wanted or cared about us. They had a special name for people like us ... "displaced persons"—DPs for short. But it wasn't the name, DP, that hurt so much; it was the way people said it that stung. We knew that non-DPs saw us as "less than" them, and it made us want to hide and fight all at the same time.

"I betcha he thinks his fancy pole is better than ours!" Henry said with a tone of contempt.

"Well, then I'll just have to show him how good I am at ketchin' fish," I said, mirroring Henry's contempt.

I threw in my line and pulled out a big slippery fish. I was about as proud as a mother is of her newborn child.

"You know," I said quietly, "I'm probably the best fisherman around!"

"Ha!" whispered Henry dismissively, "Just luck!"

Just to prove him wrong, of course, I kept on pulling out fish left and right.

Then, suddenly, an earth-shattering explosion sounded from the tank range. I could hear something ripping off the tops of the trees. Down it came to meet the lake. It skimmed across the water and shot into the muddy bank with an earth-shuddering thud.

The Burgermeister's son shrieked like a startled cat and started running, leaving his fancy fishing pole behind.

"What's the problem, baby?" I murmured scornfully under my breath.

It hadn't dawned on me yet how much danger Henry and I were in.

"That's right ... why don't you go run home to mama!" I mumbled with a smile. "Henry and I aren't scared ... nothing scares us!"

"Get down!" yelled Henry.

The fear in Henry's voice shocked me. Henry never got scared. Panic flooded my chest. I needed no further invitation and dove to the dirt. I clung so tight to the ground that not even a team of horses could have pried me loose.

Henry yelled "I'm not waitin' for more! Let's get out of here!"

"No!" I screamed. "You'll get killed!"

Henry sprang up from the ground like an electrified rabbit and was gone. I was sure he was going to be blown to smithereens. My mind went wild.

"He's still running," I thought, "What's that? Oh-oh! Is he halfway home already? I'm not sticking around!"

I couldn't stand it anymore—I ran like I had never run before. My little legs moved so fast that I was sure they were going to fly off my body. I ran so hard that I ran right into Henry. We tumbled onto the carpet of green moss and lay there with our small chests heaving, gasping for air.

"What'd ya do that for?!" Henry demanded, rubbing his arm where he'd hit the ground.

Off in the distance, from the origin of the shot, came the unmistakable sound of uncontrolled laughter. After a couple of minutes, Henry said,

"I'm gonna get back at those Russian soldiers if it is the last thing I do! I bet they shot at us on purpose," he panted angrily.

It was hard to think of Russian soldiers with autumn in the air, so I soon forgot the incident. I was mesmerized by the transformation of the world around me. It was as if the earth and sky had been collecting colours all summer long, and now were letting them all go at once. It was magnificent. It left me with a sense of awe mixed with melancholy—I knew, deep in my heart, that all this beauty, like everything in this world, will one day pass.

It was almost a full week after the fishing incident when Henry finally made his move. I should have known he wouldn't let it go—Henry never forgot when someone crossed him. I, on the other hand, had blissfully forgotten about the Russians shooting at us. After all, it did happen seven days ago, which, as far as I saw it, was as long as a lifetime.

That evening, as twilight approached, I was sitting on the deeply green summer grass by the castle gate, watching the fading sunset. The sun looked like a big, round orange, with golden streamers coming from it. The warm glow played

happily with the clouds creating reds, purples, and a thousand other colours. I was so engrossed that I didn't even notice Henry come up behind me.

"Hey, Rudi," he whispered.

I jumped, knocking my head against his chin.

"Ouch!" he cried. "Whatcha do that for?"

"I dunno—you scared me," I said, rubbing the swelling bruise on my head.

"Well, just listen. Do you want to help us?" he said, still rubbing his chin.

My ears pricked up. "Sure," I said.

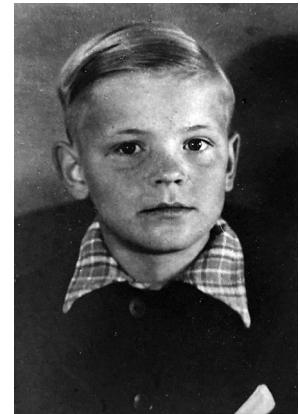
"Shhh! Not so loud," he whispered.

"Come here," he motioned.

"Do you think you could get some potatoes?" he asked quietly.

"Sure--what for?" I whispered excitedly.

"Never mind; just get them. Meet me



Rudi in 1945 at age 7. Photo Credit Carl Adrian.

here in fifteen minutes. I'll get Fritz—he'll want in on this too!"

Fritz was Henry's friend from just outside the castle. He was a year older than Henry and was always up for an adventure. I was so excited at the prospect of something new that I couldn't resist.

I figured the easiest place to get some potatoes was in the field where the big, plump potatoes were being harvested. So as not to be seen by Oma, I crouched down low into the tall, cool grass and snuck off towards the field. I soon was back at the gate with my precious load of potatoes, Fritz and Henry waiting in the shadows.

"Hey, Fritz," I said casually. "How's it goin'?"

"Shhh!" whispered Henry impatiently.

"Keep quiet! We don't want to get caught!"

My eyes grew as big as saucers as Henry unveiled the dangerous plot for revenge

cont'd on p. 12

against the Russian soldiers.

“What if we get caught?” I asked shakily.

“We won’t,” said Henry assuredly. “Just do what I tell ya, and you’ll be okay.”

“Let’s go!” said Fritz excitedly.

We followed, like sheep being led to slaughter. Slowly we crept towards the road on all fours in the dense, prickly brush. Shivers shot up and down my spine like lightning.

“Stop,” whispered Henry, barely audible. “Give us the potatoes,” he motioned.

I gave my precious bundle away. By now the sun was almost down. Eerie shadows from enormous, forbidding trees slid across the road.

“Get ready.” Henry indicated.

We waited and waited. Seconds became longer and longer. A minute became an hour ... it felt like forever!

“There! I can hear it,” I thought.

Rrrrr. Yes, there it was! The earth began to shudder as the monstrous mass of machine came closer and closer. Its gigantic tank-figure loomed out in front of me—my heart stopped.

“Don’t do it, Henry!” I whispered hysterically.

He slapped his hand over my mouth. The massive beast lumbered slowly by us and stopped as its engine ground to a halt. Henry and Fritz sprang quietly out of the brush behind the unsuspecting machine. Henry grabbed the potatoes and rocks from my arms. His hands moved in a blur—shoving, cramming, packing the exhaust pipe full. Fritz used a stick to ram everything deeper. I could almost hear the rocks tinkle down the pipe as they rolled into the heart of the tank.

Henry and Fritz ran back into the hedge. The driver started the engine again. This time a muffled, choking noise emitted from the bowels of the beast. Unaware of its fate, the tank slowly creaked away. In the distance we heard the cough, and sputter of a dying tank engine.

Hysterical laughter filled our lungs. We simply could not comprehend anything more uncontrollably funny than some stupid Russian soldier trying to pry burning hot rocks and potatoes from his tank’s exhaust pipe. The vivid image of this unfortunate Russian grabbing the red-hot exhaust was overwhelmingly hilarious.

Suddenly a large, rough hand thrust into the bush and grabbed me.

Fritz and Henry tore off like two scared cats. I screamed! I was sure I was a goner.

“I’m dead,” I thought.

My throat was thick and dry. The muscular arm jerked me out of the hedge. An angry, red-faced officer met my frightened eyes.

Without thinking, every single ounce of energy in my body was converted into a hammering kick from my leg. My foot found its target without me even thinking. As my foot connected with the soldier’s groin, his hand relaxed its grip, and the stunned man buckled over in agony. Letting out an ungodly bellow, he bent forwards in a searing spasm of pain, lost his balance on a protruding stone, and crashed face-first onto the boulder-infested dirt road. I didn’t need to be told to run. I leapt into the bush and was gone.

Only when I collapsed panting behind the castle gate did I realize what I’d done. I’d kicked a Russian soldier. A real soldier with a real gun. What had I been thinking? My whole body started to shake.

The next day, Oma asked if I wanted to go to the market with her—she knew I loved the excitement and thrill of a busy shop. In the past, I had always said yes to her, but this time, terrified of being caught, I said no. She looked at me with a surprised expression, but didn’t say anything.

I sat in my room all afternoon in silent torment. I was terrified that at any moment the small room would be raided by a squadron of armed soldiers in search of me to send me to Siberia.

That night as Oma, Henry and I sat quietly around the supper table, she said, “You boys would never guess what I heard in the marketplace today.”

“What?” Henry and I asked in unison.

“It seems that somebody from our little village tried to sabotage a tank by forcing rocks and potatoes up its exhaust pipe.”

My stomach tightened.

“A high-ranking Russian officer was injured while trying to apprehend the lawbreaker. He said that a 280-pound giant of a man dealt him several severe blows to the head and groin. They say that the soldier is recovering in the barracks hospital.”

Henry stared at me incredulously. I couldn’t help but feel a sense of pride welling up in my chest. Although I knew it was wrong to feel happiness at the misfortunes of others, how could I not feel proud of what I’d done with my big brother looking at me with admiration? Oma continued,

“Henry, Rudi ... Frau Hildebrandt told me today that we are to be packed and ready to leave by 8:00 A.M. tomorrow. That disturbance with the Russians yesterday is bound to result in a search as soon as that soldier is well enough to identify his assailant. We can’t risk being caught in such a search. We’re taking the western route through Brandenburg. Frau Hildebrandt heard the Americans are there now. We’ll be safer with them than with
cont’d on p. 12.

Church Disciplinary Records as a Family History Source

cont’d from p. 3.

bad turn were often brought to the attention of the ministry by the person who felt wronged in the transaction. This allowed the members to sort out bad business or financial arrangements without involving the Prussian or Russian court systems. In early Russia the Odessa archival collection of the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers shows a significant number of business-related court cases involving Mennonites. However, none of these were between Mennonites.

Endnotes

1. Glenn Penner, “Russian Mennonite Church Records: What Has Survived and Where They Are Now?” *Mennonite Historian*. March 2019, p.3.
2. Adalbert Goertz, “Mennonite church records in Prussia”. *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 50 (Jan 1976), 66-67; 51 (Jul 1977), 247-248.
3. All surviving Prussian Mennonite church records can be found here: [https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/churchregisters/Oestliche_preussische_Provinzen_und_Polen_\(Teil\)/](https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/churchregisters/Oestliche_preussische_Provinzen_und_Polen_(Teil)/).
4. https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Tiegenhagen_Brotherhood_Meetings_1784-1805.pdf, https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Marcushof_Brotherhood_Meetings_1792-1819.pdf, https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Orlofferfelde_Brotherhood_Meetings_1772-1809.pdf. The Plauschwarren (Lithuania) translation will appear on the Mennonite genealogy website in the near future.
5. Scans of the original can be found at: [https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/churchregisters/Oestliche_preussische_Provinzen_und_Polen_\(Teil\)/Elbing-Ellerwald_-_Amtstagebuch_von_Gerhard_Wiebe_1778-1795.html](https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/churchregisters/Oestliche_preussische_Provinzen_und_Polen_(Teil)/Elbing-Ellerwald_-_Amtstagebuch_von_Gerhard_Wiebe_1778-1795.html).
6. The Heinrich Donner diary is translated here: <https://www.mharchives.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Heinrich-Donner-Diary-12-Feb-2023.pdf>.
7. John B. Toews, *The diaries of David Epp : 1837-1843*, Vancouver, 2000.
8. Harvey L. Dyck, *A Mennonite in Russia : the diaries of Jacob D. Epp, 1851-1880*, Toronto, 2013.
9. For more information on the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers records found in the Odessa archives see: <https://www.mharchives.ca/holdings/organizations/OdessaArchiveF6/>.

Rudi and the Russians

cont'd from p. 11.

the Russians.” My stomach dropped.

“What!” I mumbled in disbelief, “Leaving? Already? No!”

I looked around our small room ... the cracked plaster walls, the narrow window overlooking the flowerbeds, the corner where I'd hidden my collection of smooth stones from the lake. I had to go, just when I'd started to feel safe.

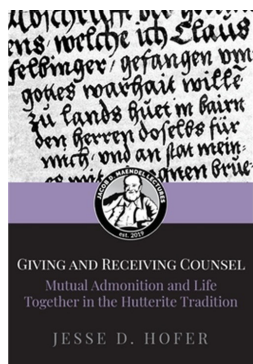
The next morning, as Oma closed the wooden door of our cozy little home in the castle wall, I couldn't help but feel sad. I looked back one last time—the ivy rustling in the morning breeze, a robin calling from the gate post. I loved this castle, with all its velvety flowers, chattering birds, vivid colours, and fairyland countryside. It hurt to leave.

I wanted to run back inside, to hide in the moss-carpeted forest and pretend we didn't have to go. But Oma's hand was warm and firm in mine, and together we walked through the rusty gate for the last time. The hinges squeaked, as if to say “goodbye.”

I'd never noticed the squeaky gate before and hearing it, I felt an aching emptiness welling up in my chest ...

“Will I ever find a place where I belong? Will we ever find a place we can call home?”

Book Review



By Paul Derksen

Jesse D. Hofer, *Giving and Receiving Counsel: Mutual Admonition and Life Together in the Hutterite Tradition*. MacGregor: Hutterian Brethren Book Centre, 2025. 86 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1998141166

In the introduction to the 2025 edition of the annual Jacob D. Maendel Lectures, Kenny Wollmann describes these lectures, delivered

by Jesse D. Hofer, not as prescriptive in nature, but rather as a kind of provocation intended to “serve as a resource for thoughtful and faithful reflection on what it means to live as Christian community today.” Therefore, in these two Maendel lectures (and a third essay by Hofer included as an appendix), Hofer offers historical and theological material intended to guide Hutterite thought and practice, especially as it concerns “the nature of communal life, the practice of giving and receiving counsel, and the spiritual formation of youth and adults alike.”

The first lecture, “Early Hutterite Visions of Life Together,” is framed by Psalm 133, with its emphasis on how “good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!” Hofer draws on the work of Claus Felbinger and Hans Schmied (offering his own translation of several primary texts), finding in these sources the raising of questions relevant to Hofer's own concerns regarding the enriching and extension of giving and receiving counsel. He claims that Felbinger and Schmied set a direction that deserves attention in contemporary Hutterite life; namely, that a communal life is necessary “because we need each other to remain faithfully aligned with the way of Jesus, and we live this way to be a witness to the watching world.” Hofer also identifies a caution regarding the tradition of the Hutterite Lehr (teaching) in which the language of “admonish, warn, and discipline” serves the community well, but tends to be too narrow regarding mutual admonition. Hofer offers for consideration instead the phrase “giving and receiving counsel” which in his understanding signals a “broader responsibility to engage in the harder work of discernment, fellowship, and instruction.” He then turns to biblical material, citing the Gospels, Acts, Paul's and other epistles, where he finds not only the addressing of wrongdoing, but “the more comprehensive practice of giving and receiving counsel, of encouraging and building up one another through the sharing of gifts.”

In the second essay, “Building the Body with Mutual Admonition Today,” anchored in Philippians 2:1-8, Hofer seeks to bring to view how Hutterite communities are giving and receiving counsel, and how this practice might be enriched and extended. He begins by taking stock of where he sees the giving and receiving of counsel already being practiced in both personal and more public, structured ways. His explicit concern is that Hutterite communities are not realizing their full potential for spiritual mentorship, “especially in the form of intentional structured spaces that support the spiritual formation of our youth, mutual admonition and instruction among adult members, and the strengthening of intergenerational bonds through community-wide exchanges.”

Hofer specifies two areas for enrichment and extension—the spiritual formation and

discipling of youth, and then the wrestling together with Scripture and faith experience. Regarding the first area, Hofer acknowledges that the waves of modernity are washing up on Hutterite shores, and in response, he offers suggestions for ways that spiritual formation might be cultivated deliberately, advocating for the development of public spaces for practices such as student conferences, or ‘check-ins’ between a Sunday School teacher and student, encouraging youth sharing circles, and corporate prayer practices. Regarding the second, Hofer draws on early Hutterite practice to emphasize the importance of Bible reading and seeks to find ways to organize structured public encounters with the Bible. He describes the recent practice of open mic sharing, noting especially the important possibility of multi-generational conversation in that setting. Hofer openly expresses his longing for Hutterite communities to share wisdom across generations.

This book includes an appendix, which consists of an essay by Hofer previously published in Kenny Wollmann, ed., *Navigating Tradition and Innovation*, a collection of essays also well worth reading. This longer, more densely written essay is theologically rich and seeks to build capacity for communal conversation among Hutterites. Hofer offers diagnostic work, pointing to a deficiency in a culture of discussion and communal discernment, but moves beyond that diagnosis to explore theological and biblical concepts along with descriptions of necessary skills to build the capacity for which he longs. Included here is also a call to repentance, an essential dimension of capacity-building.

Overall, this book is valuable in several ways, the first being that it seeks to be a provocation to contemporary Hutterite communities. The provocation comes from a voice internal to the community, a serious voice that comes from a place of life-long personal involvement and commitment to that community, and offers reminders of historical, biblical, and theological sources internal to the rich Hutterite tradition. Further, these essays offer the non-Hutterite reader a glimpse into the on-going life of a community which seeks to be faithful to lordship of Jesus Christ, and as such, offers provocation to faith communities outside the Hutterite tradition as well. Therefore, I highly recommend this book (along with the previously published Maendel Lectures in the series) to both Hutterite and non-Hutterite readers.

Paul Derksen is Associate Professor of Theology and Anabaptist Studies at Canadian Mennonite University. He is also the P.M. Friesen Co-Chair in Biblical and Theological Studies