



# Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta *Newsletter*

Volume VI, No. 2

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## Does Anyone Care?

By Peter Penner

Two families in the Ukraine were joined together by marriage in 1897 and were separated in 1926-27 by emigration. They did not meet again until 2003 and then only as second cousins. Why did it take so long? This story is not entirely unique. In one form or another it has been repeated many times since WW II when refugees were reunited with families, and perhaps even more frequently recently with the appearance of the *Spaet-Aussiedler* in various parts of Germany. Some were thought to be long lost in Stalin's vast unmarked graveyard. Once arrived in Germany, they began to ask, will anyone remember or does anyone care?

This is part of the Steingart story, the patriarch in this case being Heinrich Steingart (1873-1957) and that first marriage being to one Gertruda Wiens (1878-1922), the daughter of

Abram and Justina (Toews) Wiens, Neu-Halbstadt, Zagradovka. Heinrich, it is conjectured, came to Zagradovka from the Molotschna as a young man, and found employment with Abram Wiens who had the equivalent of two farms (*zwei Vollwirtschaften*) and two of the best houses in the village of Neu-Halbstadt [# 4]. In time, Heinrich was attracted to the daughter Gertruda and married her in 1897. Heinrich's presence, physical strength and probably his know-how were appreciated because the Wiebe family had health problems. Gertruda had only one sister, and two brothers who were not of much help on the farm: Abram developed epilepsy, and Aron had poor vision.

What made Gertruda's case even more helpless was the fact that her father, Abram Wiens, died in 1899 and her mother Justina in 1908. Gertruda and her siblings were thus orphaned. For these reasons Heinrich became a guardian to his brothers-in-law just two years after his marriage, as well as a tower of strength in the business of farming. Therefore he stood a good chance to inherit some of that property in Neu-Halbstadt, Zagradovka.

Meanwhile, this marriage between Heinrich and Gertruda proved really fertile, in that Gertruda bore him ten children between 1899 and 1921- four girls and six boys. The eldest, Justina (1899-1992) who married Abram T. Janzen, became the mother of Justina (Janzen) Penner (1926-). It was Justina Penner who finally

made the connection with Gertruda's nephew, one Heinrich Wiens, but not before the year 2001 (Justina is the wife of the writer).

Another sad part of the story was the death of Gertruda in 1922 at the age of 44. She succumbed to the terrible scourge of typhoid which ravaged the villages during the famine years of 1921-22, a story almost every reader will know. This left all those children motherless. Her sister had married and emigrated to Brazil; her epileptic brother had died (1918); and her brother Aron meanwhile married Helene Regehr (1917), just in time to face the uncertainties of the Russian Revolution.

Heinrich, badly needing a mother for his ten children, soon married Aganetha, the widow of Abram Walde, the one who suffered death at the hands of Machno in 1919 in the village of Orloff (#6). That marriage in 1923 brought more children into the family. This considerably enlarged family, where some had already married, took the revolutionary alarms to heart, sold

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**Please Mark Your Calendar for  
April 23 and 24, 2004**

**MHSA**

**Annual General Meeting**

**Friday, April 23** - Lendrum Mennonite Church, Edmonton

**Saturday, April 24** - First Mennonite Church, Edmonton

**Featured Speakers:** Dr. John B. Toews & Tena Wiebe

More details in next newsletter/

## Editorial

By *Diedrich P. Neufeld*

Guess what? MHSa is having growing pains. The number of members has increased significantly in 2003. The number of members who pay their dues on time is rising. The number and variety of services and meetings has increased. The visitor register in the new Archives reflects the

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[www.mennonites.ca/mhsa/](http://www.mennonites.ca/mhsa/)

### Executive

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growth as new faces continue to appear. The need for volunteers is expanding. But, the pain includes the loss of some volunteers and participants who withdraw from time to time. We regret that and hope to adjust so everyone with historical interests can find a fit to suit them.

We were indeed pleased that the busload of enthusiasts who endured, perhaps even enjoyed, the 14 hours to La Crete. Gradually the bridge between the northern and southern halves of the Alberta Mennonite population, is materializing. MMI and MCC began the building. MHSa picked up some tools and perhaps the churches and conferences can find a niche as well.

The MHSa vision is expanding, as opportunity for more space looks imminent. With it comes the need for significantly increased revenue. This comes at a time when the MCC appeal for capital funds also peaks.

This edition features a sad story with happy overtones. A Mennonite family, scattered over the globe without any awareness of each other's circumstances, has begun to reunite. If you haven't yet, go back and read Peter Penner's "Does Anyone Care?"

Also noteworthy is the appeal for Molochna photos. Ukrainians and Mennonites are collaborating on a bicentennial celebration in 2004 as part of the revitalization of life in the region known to us as Molochna. Check through your albums and follow the stories emerging from this

## Chairman's Corner

By *Colin P. Neufeldt*

Since I became chairman last spring I have come to a new appreciation of MHSa's many volunteers. Take, for example, the MHSa executive -- dedicated individuals who have worked together as a team in tackling various and sundry matters that have arisen over the last few months, including

negotiating a new space for MHSa archives in the Calgary MCC Thrift Store. They have devoted many hours of their time to ensure that MHSa interests are safeguarded, and I have been very impressed by their support of the MHSa cause.

I also cannot overlook the many volunteers (particularly those in the Calgary area) who keep our archives in operation, catalogue new materials, assist the public, edit and publish our newsletter, as well as maintain and update our website. Their tireless efforts have proven invaluable and all of them deserve an honourable mention for their tremendous contributions.

Credit must also be given to those serving on various committees. The archives committee has been busy reviewing plans of our new space and at the same time refining the vision and mandate of the archival objectives of MHSa. Other committees have worked energetically in performing tasks which are so important to the work of the MHSa, but rarely receive acknowledgment for their contributions.

Our hats are also off to those who worked so hard in organizing our spring AGM in Gem and fall conference in La Crete. From recruiting speakers, to organizing transportation, to planning accommodation and meals, volunteers have contributed their time and energy to make this past year's conferences very memorable events.

What have I learned from all of this? That MHSa is not just a collection of archival documents and books, but a dedicated group of volunteers who take pride in researching, discussing, preserving, and writing about Alberta Mennonite history. I am very honoured to be part of such a

(Continued from page 1)

what they could, and emigrated to Manitoba in 1926-1927 where they settled near Steinbach. Heinrich had been able to pay passage for his family and had some \$500 left with which to buy a small farm.

Aron and Helene (Regehr) Wiens, absent during the emigration years at Trubetskoy, found themselves thrown on the mercy of people in #4 until forced into the collective of the First Five Year Plan, where Aron, of poor vision, carried the mail from house to house. By this time, they had six children: Helena, Aron, Heinrich, Anna, Justina (Christel), and Jacob (Jasch). The mother, Helena, died in 1940.

The motherless Wiens family rejoiced over some changes during the German occupation of 1941-43, but were swept up in 1943 by the 'Great Trek' via Poland in the direction of Germany. Young Aron (age 23) and Heinrich (19) were impressed into the German army. Aron was taken as a prisoner of war by the Soviet army, but eventually got back to Germany. Heinrich was captured by the Americans in Austria, was badly treated at first, and held there until repatriation into Soviet military hands with the cooperation of high-ranking American generals in 1946. This, Heinrich said, was like a sentence of death and many around him chose suicide.

Aron, his daughters and young Jasch, were repatriated and sent to Archangelsk, where Aron died in 1945. Helena the eldest, who never married, took the young Jasch in her care. These siblings all suffered the long years

of the Gulag experience, until they were freed of the *Spetskomandantura* regime when Khrushchev came to power in 1956. All were able to move to a warmer climate, mostly to Khirgizstan, where they found work, marriage partners, and worship opportunities.

Heinrich Wiens was sent on a 39-day railcar ride to the Pamir mountains area. He was eventually assigned to a uranium mine where he worked for twenty years. Here he met his wife, an Anna Boschmann, whom he married in a civil ceremony. Together, they had a family of four children, three daughters, and one son, Helena, Anna, Agnes, and Heinrich.

The pathos of this story lies in the fact that the Wiens family members often knew very little of each other's experience in the Soviet Union. They certainly knew nothing

*The pathos of this story lies in the fact that the Wiens family members often knew very little of each other's experience in the Soviet Union.*

whatsoever of their (Steingart) relatives in Canada, the family that for years had called Heinrich

and Aganetha (Walde) Steingart their grandfather and grandmother. That large Steingart and Walde family had scattered over Canada. Who ever gave the Wienses a thought?

Aron Janzen, who had married Maria, the second eldest daughter of Heinrich and Gertruda, made several efforts to meet with members of his immediate family, making arrangements for them to meet him in places like Frunze or Alma Ata. He visited them in Germany after they had come as *Aussiedler*, in the Bielefeld area. But he does not seem to have made enquiries about any descendents of the Wiens family.

Heinrich and Anna (Boschmann) Wiens with their children came to Germany in 1988, landing in Nuernberg and were assigned to

Tuttlingen on the Danube river, in Baden-Wuerttemberg, *Schwabenland*. All the children, by then in their thirties, got good jobs. Four of Heinrich's siblings had preceded him and were settled in Hamm-Heesen, west of Bielefeld

Once settled, Heinrich began to seek Steingart relatives and heard about Aron Janzen, Coaldale. At last, he thought, I have found in Aron's wife, Maria (Steingart) Janzen, a first cousin of his Aunt Gertruda (1878-1922). "Surely they will respond if I write them." They unfortunately did not. The letter of 1992 was apparently mislaid and left unanswered.

It was not until 2001 that Justina Penner, Maria and Aron Janzen's niece, heard about Heinrich in Tuttlingen, and resolved to contact him. When she made contact by phone the first time, Heinrich was so grateful - at last someone was showing that they cared! He started writing something of his story. His ability in German as a "Low German Mennonite" (as he called himself) was greater than many *Aussiedler* had demonstrated.

Finally, Justina and I resolved to visit Heinrich and his siblings - living hundreds of kilometres apart in Germany- in October 2003. For this we rented a car and took to the Autobahn. Great experience. To Helena, the eldest, born in 1918, now 85 years of age, our appearance in Hamm-Heesen was 'a miracle', as she called it. The yearning for a communication, the knowledge that someone cared about a family that had been unfortunate in its passage through life, chosen or fated for punishment, loss, suffering, and lack of concern, or so it appeared, was profound.

They were all so grateful.

They lacked for nothing, one can say, except this touch of family, humanity, a sense of belonging restored!

## Looking for Windows on the Mennonite and Ukrainian Past

*Paul Toews, Director*

*Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno Pacific University*

In 2004 Mennonites and Ukrainians together will celebrate the establishment of the Molochna colony in 1804 in what was then known as New South Russia. The history of the past two hundred years in the valley of the Molochna belongs to both peoples.

Mennonites were a significant part of the population of the region to 1943. Ukrainians have been present for the entire 200 years. We have worked together, tilled the common soil, suffered together, assisted each other in times of need, developed many friendships and inter-married.

A bicentennial moment is one in which we both look backward and forward. It is a time to remember and to dream. For both Mennonites and Ukrainians the memories will be mixed. There is surely much that will be fondly embraced. The Molochna story is central to the history of Mennonites in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. It was the largest single Mennonite colony. It provided settlers for many other colonies, pioneered agricultural practices that Russian officials held up for others to emulate, was the center of religious dissent and change in the nineteenth century, and provided much of the intellectual leadership for Mennonites throughout Russian imperial times and the early Soviet period. It is a story of deep religious idealism and devotion, of

economic vitality and entrepreneurship, and of building thriving communities and institutions. Today its sons and daughters are scattered around the globe.

As we remember the Molochna story and revisit these accomplishments we will also confront the tragedy that enveloped all Mennonites in the Soviet Union in the 20th Century. The ravages of war, famine, the crushing opposition of the Soviet regime and finally the relocation of virtually all Mennonites from the Molochna area during the 1940s, are stories of deep pain and sorrow and of death and destruction.

Today in the Molochna region Ukrainians live in houses, attend schools and work in factories once built by Mennonites. These structures are now mostly in disrepair and reflect how the passage of time since 1943 has not been kind to the inhabitants of the Molochna region. The devastation that came to Ukraine during the Soviet era has now been overlaid by the economic failure of the past ten years. The measures utilized by agencies like the United Nations, to assess the health of the countries indicate that the Ukraine is worse off today than it was when it achieved independence in 1991. Southeastern Ukraine, in particular, has suffered from an economic downturn. Deprivation is real in the Molochna region. For many Ukrainians it is difficult to sustain hope.

From 1943 to the early 1990s the Mennonite witness in the valley of the Molochna was silent. Now that witness has reappeared in numerous ways. The most prominent signs are the Mennonite Church in Kutuzovka (formerly

Petershagen) and the Mennonite Centre in Molochansk (formerly Halbstadt). Each has refurbished a historic Mennonite building and has a visible presence. In addition Mennonite Central Committee and the Zaporozhye Mennonite Church are also active in the Molochna region. All are sharing the reconciling faith and compassion that are central to the Anabaptist/Mennonite way. The refurbished buildings are visible symbols of hope. They not only signal Mennonites coming to establish congregations and offer humanitarian assistance, but also offer a window into the vitality that once marked their communities.

During the past decade it has been my privilege to repeatedly visit the villages of the Molochna region. Many of those visits have also included a stop at one of the village schools. Frequently someone at the school has inquired if we have any photos of their community. The inquiry is usually accompanied by the statement that "we have no photographic record of this area prior to the 1940s. Can you help us to acquire some photos of earlier times?" The question certainly reflects curiosity. But it is also more. Ukrainians are in search of a past that can help them construct a different future. Ukraine needs a new moral, political and economic order. For the peoples of southeastern Ukraine there is no better place to find that order than in the Mennonite story. The Mennonite story with entrepreneurial skill, democratic practices and moral sensibilities is also a part of their history.

This story is now being rediscovered as a Ukrainian story. Contemporary Ukrainian scholars are re-introducing the Mennonite story to classrooms in eastern Ukraine and are eager to document the story more fully with

photographs, documents and artifacts. This interest in our Mennonite past can result in warm and authentic connections today.

Irmie Konrad and her Vancouver family have an ongoing relationship with the High School in Vladivka (formerly Waldheim), thanks to their encounter with the history teacher and their sending of important photos and documents. The prosperous looking village of the past was embraced as a symbol of what is possible in the region.

The celebration of the bicentennial of the establishment of the Molochna colony can be an important window to this part of the Ukrainian story. One of the bicentennial gifts that we can give to the region is a photographic record of this past. Last fall, representatives from museums, educational institutions and the mayor of Molochansk (formerly Halbstadt) all lent their voices to a request for such a photographic record.

The Mennonite archival network of North America that collects Russian Mennonite materials (from Ontario to British Columbia and from Kansas to California) are collaborating to bring together a rich collection of images that we can reproduce and bring to Ukraine. To do so we need the photographs that are in the homes and family albums of the descendants of the Molochna Colony. Many persons have rich photographic collections. The archival agencies are collectively asking that you send copies (or originals that we will duplicate). Archives participating in the collection of these photographs and in the preparation of this gift include Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ontario, the Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Centre

for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg, Manitoba, the Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia in Abbotsford, British Columbia, the Mennonite Library and Archives in Newton, Kansas and the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno, California. Please contact one of these archival agencies if you can help us to create a photographic record of the Molochna Colony.

## Commemorating the Janz Family Emigration

By Peter Penner

The surviving B.B. Janz clan gathered in Coaldale on Sunday August 4, 2003 to commemorate the achievements of Benjamin B. Janz, supported through thick and thin by his wife, Maria (Rogalsky).

Led by John Pauls, a grandson of B.B. Janz' sister, they formed a considerable choir Sunday morning, offering three songs, among them an old favorite: "*Mache mich selig, O Jesu.*"

During the afternoon the former Mennonite Brethren Church building, dating from 1939, was filled to capacity. The main floor, reconstructed as Museum, "Gem of the West", seats over 300, and was filled to capacity. Attendance was free, but donations were welcomed.

Having organized the event, John B. Toews, Vancouver, called on the three surviving children of Benjamin and Maria to reminisce. First, Mary, born in 1911, related what a discouraging place the Ukraine became with the coming of the Revolution. She spoke of how they received Mennonite relief materials, and of what it meant to have her father so frequently absent in the years 1919 to 1926. He paved a way for 20,000 persons to emigrate.

Jacob (1912- ), and Martha (1920- ), both spoke of early resentments built up over their

father's absence. Those resentments were however, swept away as they began to understand the overwhelming results of their

IN COMMEMORATION OF  
BENJAMIN B. AND  
MARIA (ROGALSKY) JANZ.

THEIR PERSONAL COURAGE,  
PERSISTENCE AND SACRIFICE, BY  
GOD'S GRACE,  
ENABLED OVER 20,000  
MENNONITES FROM RUSSIA TO  
ENTER CANADA  
DURING THE 1920's.

Erected by the  
Anabaptist Foundation  
(Canada),  
August 4, 2002

father's efforts. Each speaker paid tribute to the courageous and uncomplaining mother, Maria.

Toews, for some years at Regent College, Vancouver, and the author of several books (1967 and 1978) on B B Janz, then reminisced on the achievements of Janz the Emigration Leader. He had been able to relate diplomatically to people in government, even to Communists, because he believed that in nearly every man there must be some sense of decency and fairness. All of this reminded the guests of their immeasurable heritage and gave them opportunity to commemorate one of the most significant movements of peoples in Mennonite history.

Soprano Edith Wiens from Munich, Germany, a daughter of Gertrude (Janz) and David B. Wiens, was present to give a half-hour recital in memory of her grandparents. Her husband Kai Moser and their two sons Johannes and Benjamin were also present. (She comes to Banff occasionally to give Master classes in voice and

on this occasion could be present for this special occasion.)

She sang as only she can, accompanied by Betty Suderman at the piano.

Following that concert, Toews led the way to the cemetery behind the Museum. There, nestled between the headstone for Maria (Rogalsky) Janz (1879-1953) and Benjamin B Janz (1877-1964) was a cairn which the three siblings were invited to unveil. On it were imprinted the following words:

Then everyone was invited to return to the Museum's basement exhibition floor for refreshments. Among them, offered for dunking in coffee, were *geroestete Zwiebach* (roasted buns), a suitable migration survival symbol.

## One Hundred Years of Church Life

By *Diedrich P. Neufeld*

The Bergthal Mennonite Church celebrated its centennial in 2003. Many who called Bergthal home as they grew up, returned from far and wide, to renew acquaintances and to celebrate. Reminiscences flowed freely and the elaborate display of photos confirmed and enriched many stories.

Descendants of the three Neufeld brothers, who were so central to the location and development of this congregation, unveiled and dedicated a cairn in honour of the three couples on whose homesteads the existing church buildings and cemetery are located.

Part of that story is recorded in the two booklets: one written by Helen Brown (A Short History of the Bergthal Mennonite Church 1903 - 1978.) and the more recent

XXXXXXXXXX by Paul Dyck and Henry Goerzen. Erna Goerzen, who was concerned about the tendency to credit the male population to leadership offered the following to help balance the historical perspective.

### Life of Pioneer Woman in Bergthal

*Erna Goerzen*

We often hear of the origins of Bergthal Mennonite Church, but what about the role of women and children who came with the men to settle in the area east of Didsbury?

Their first and temporary stay was in the immigration shed, where each family's area was marked out by blankets hung over wires. Cooking was done outdoors and women were ingenious; some cooked on an iron tripod over the open fire, some fashioned clay ovens, while some families brought along stove tops which were laid over dried mud bricks, and oven doors to close the clay ovens. That summer of 1901 was one of heavy rains, and life for the two months in the immigration shed can't have been one happy picnic.

As soon as the men had claimed their homesteads and erected some shelter, families moved out onto their own land. Their homes were not in neatly laid villages as they had known in Manitoba, but on individual farms. The vastness of the open prairie must have seemed to be an overwhelming treeless waste. A devastating prairie fire in 1897 had all but wiped out any trees, except some shrubbery growing along gullies. To combat loneliness and to ensure access to water, the three Neufeld families settled

adjacent to each other. The brothers and families each lived along a creek south and west of the present-day Bergthal Church. Pioneer life on the homesteads was not easy, everyone was poor and worked hard to carve out a



new life. The first baby at the settlement came in June of 1901, born to Gerhard and Helena (Wiebe) Neufeld. Cornelius Gerhard ("CG") who lived to be well over 90 years.

The Abram and Sarah Dyck family was an enterprising family. While Abram a builder, was away from home building homes, schools, and the first Bergthal Church in 1903, Sarah and her oldest son Abe were doing the homestead work. In 1902, they ploughed the required three acres of land and planted flax. Unfortunately, there was no way to harvest the crop, so the pigs were turned into it. Then when they butchered them they couldn't eat the meat. Mrs Dyck and her neighbour frequently went fishing in the Lone Pine Creek, successfully catching ample numbers in the nets. On the way home they gathered willow sticks to supplement the dry cow dung fuel used for cooking,

Life went on, more children were birthed and became part of

the work crew. One year, Mr. Dyck with two sons and three daughters put up forty stacks of hay for rancher Pat Burns, during the months of June to August. The girls, Susie and Tina, were so tired by the end of August, that one of them said: "Wouldn't it be nice if we took sick so we wouldn't have to hay in September as well?" It so happened that both contracted typhoid fever, and so did their father. For three months Mrs Dyck nursed her family, on duty day and night, with little sleep and hardly ever undressed. They all survived. Daughter Susanna lived to be 100 years old, and died a few weeks ago. It was said of her, "Her children shall rise up and call her blessed". The same could be said of all mothers who first came to The West.

Another notable mother of that era was Grandma Reimer. She and her husband ran the store and rooming house at Neapolis. Mrs. Reimer was a midwife, and was said to have delivered more than 2,500 babies. She attended two birthings of her daughter Maggie (Mrs. Jacob Brown).

The Brown family had daughters who looked beyond the local school. Emma received



music lessons and shared her music at home and church throughout her life. Helen and Lydia took their high school, having to board away from home. Helen became a teacher of several generations of children, Lydia, a nurse, was eventually the head of nursing in the Didsbury hospital. Later the youngest sister Ruth also became a nurse.

Two doctors arrived in Didsbury in 1902. They visited their patients by horse and buggy. Health care was still largely in the care of the women in the home. Mustard plasters for chest congestion and poultices of vinegar, turpentine, onions or bread would be applied for boils.

In 1919, when the great flu epidemic hit the area, Didsbury still did not have a hospital. The school was closed and converted into a temporary hospital. Doctors, nurses and volunteers worked around the clock to care for the sick, and although there were many deaths, many lives were saved as well. Volunteers also brought food, did laundry and took care of maintenance.

Didsbury was the shopping center for the area. Eggs, cream and butter were exchanged for groceries. Eggs might be packed in oats in a pail and then sent to town where the shopkeeper would retrieve them from the oats. Women didn't often get to go shopping. The story is told of Elisabeth (Abram) Neufeld sending 5 year old John along with his father to get something she needed. When the storekeeper asked the little boy -"Are you going to pay for this?" the answer was "Write it on", transposed from the low German "*Schriev et aun!*".

The first telephone came to this area in 1914. In the early years there were no built up roads, but only prairie trails over grassy knolls

and through gullies. At high water times groceries could be unexpectedly washed off the wagon deck. In summer prairie fires were a constant danger. But the settlers worked hard and lived in faith. Of Mother Elisabeth it is said, "Elisabeth was a hard working woman. She kept a large garden, took care of chickens, ducks and geese, and milked a number of cows". Eight children grew up around her and father Abe, "and they became honest, hardworking and useful residents."

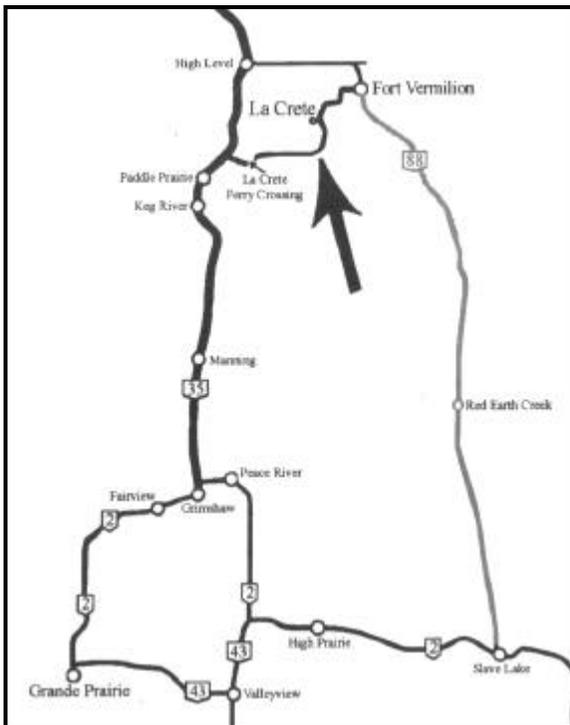
The settlement progressed rapidly and in the space of about 10 years, fine homes were being built. "Images" a book in the Didsbury Public Library includes photos of the new home which Abraham built including the attached new barn. That house/barn is still structurally sound after more than 90 years. Then came the Great War and the cutbacks in the economy. Quoting the same book: " Women wore calico instead of lace, cotton bloomers instead of rayon. In church the collection plate held 5 cents, 10 cents and pennies, rather than the quarters.

The named women were just a few of the many who helped provide the stability, growth and commitment of the Bergthal community which celebrated one hundred years of continual service to the gathered and larger community.

## La Crete – "Agricultural Centre of the North"

By Henry Dick, FMC Edmonton

I joined the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta sponsored bus trip to La Crete, "Alberta's Last Frontier", the last weekend of September and I was invited to share the experience with you the readers.



The bus trip itself was an adventure, travelling with diverse group of Mennonites from Coaldale, Lethbridge, Gem, Calgary, Didsbury, Tofield and Edmonton. Harold, the enthusiastic genealogist, with the aid of his laptop and GRANDMA (genealogy database) had most persons onboard related to each other (and in some cases even to themselves) by the time we reached our destination. He also discovered that a number of us had relatives in the La Crete community. The scenery, along the way, was enhanced by the rich golds, yellows and reds that characterize the fall months became increasingly striking as we proceeded north.

We arrived in La Crete about 9:30 pm and were immediately introduced to our hosts (billets) for the weekend. For most of us this meant that our tongues needed to be switched to speak *plautdietch*, or, at the least, "Germish" - the local dialect.

La Crete itself is a hamlet of about 2000 residents (the largest hamlet in Alberta). The county has a population of about 7000, 95% of which are of Mennonite background,

and covers an area of 66,000 square kilometers. The residents have created an economy and a community which is obviously prosperous, but without ostentation. They are unapologetic about their perceived backwardness (language and culture) and regaled us with stories about themselves and their ways while we *knacked saut* (ate spits), spitting the shells directly onto the floor. They also shared with us stories about their pioneer beginnings; the sheer determination it took to overcome the obstacles of northern climate, physical isolation, forested land and

governmental disinterest. But mostly they shared themselves with us. They invited us into their homes and into their community and extended to us the level of hospitality normally reserved for "family". The sense of kinship we were made to feel, is what best characterizes the weekend for me.

The first Mennonites came to the area in the mid 1930's. Most came from Saskatchewan and Mexico and some from Manitoba. Most travelled by road to the town of Peace River, then by boat (or most often by hastily constructed barge) to Carcajou, Indian land on the east side of the river. Eventually these families and later arrivals, continued further north to La Crete landing or to Fort Vermilion.

The stories of hardship, misadventure and human tragedy along the way and during the early pioneer years are legion. Farming and forestry became the economic mainstays of the community. In pioneer times this income was supplemented by trapping fox, beaver and squirrel. Currently logging is an annual \$50M industry

with about 7 million trees cut annually by 12 local logging companies. These logs are processed by local sawmills; the largest of which, employs in excess of 100 people.

Despite the population of the La Crete community, they have no hospital and no resident doctors though medical staff, from High Level hold, office hours in La Crete on a regular basis. The community has built and operates an ultra-modern seniors lodge, complete with nursing care. Despite the early promise by government that it would not provide schools nor education for the new settlers, La Crete now has a modern public school, kindergarten through grade 12. When asked about the public school dropout rate, we were told that of about 200 grade one students, 60 will complete grade 12. Part of the reason for the high dropout rate is that there are many high-paying jobs available to young men in the forestry sector, leaving little incentive to advance their education. For young women there are fewer opportunities. Although many are today pursuing careers as nurses, teachers or support workers, one lady commented that "most are busy making us grandmothers". The only post-secondary educational facility in the region is Lakeland College in Fort Vermilion northeast of La Crete.

Although we heard and observed much about how the "La Cretians" work together to maintain a prospering community, we also experienced some of what separates the community. Each of us accompanied our hosts to their worship service on Sunday morning. Frieda and I attended the "Old Colony" church and were struck by the apparent disparity between our Saturday experience

and our Sunday experience. The 'Old Colony' is the most conservative of the four church groups (Old Colony, Sommerfelder, Bergthaler and EMCs) which dominate the community. Men and women enter the church through separate entrances, with no visiting en route. The building has no electricity, no central heating and no indoor washrooms. The congregation sits on wooden plank benches without backrests, the women on the left and the men on the right. The women are dressed in dark dresses and black shawl or kerchief head coverings; the men in dark suits without ties. The gaze is directed forward, with no visiting and no looking around. The singing is led by *Vorsänger* (song leaders) and is unaccompanied. The songs have no, to me, recognizable melody, but are chanted in a nasal tone that makes it difficult to understand the words; even to follow the words in the songbook. Two songs with three verses each took what seemed to be about 20 minutes to complete.

The elderly preacher, dressed in a black coat, entered from a side door after the singing and proceeded directly to the raised pulpit. He read a sermon in *plautdietch*, interspersed twice by silent prayer for which the congregation knelt. He was so soft-spoken that it was difficult for us to hear him (no p.a. system).

Following the sermon another two songs were chanted, after which the congregation filed out through their separate entrances, as silently as they had come. They proceeded directly to their modern vehicles and departed to their modern homes (well - our hosts did not have TV or carpeted floors). On Monday morning they continued with their modern day pursuits in an only slightly atypical 21st century community.

I'm certain that the preceding is an unfair simplification of the relation of faith and life in the Old Colony community. Nevertheless, when asked about the few young people we saw in the congregation we were told that they were some recent arrivals from Bolivia, not members of their own families. In

the past year about 100 Bolivian Mennonite families have moved to La Crete and currently an average of 4 families per month are arriving from Bolivia. The fact that the majority of children of Old Colony Mennonites appear not to be choosing the Old Colony church as their church home raises the question about whether the Old Colony church will be able to sustain itself into the next generation. I hasten to add that this is not a question that is unique to the Old Colony church but is one that each of us in our various congregations need to be concerned with. This past summer a new "fellowship hall" was built on the Old Colony church site. After some discussion about equipping the facility with the conveniences of electricity, gas and water the decision was to maintain the traditional standards. The fear is that if change is introduced at one level, change will occur at all levels.

On behalf of all of us, who experienced such genuine warmth from our Mennonite brothers and sisters in La Crete, that Frieda and I wish to express our appreciation. To our hosts, Bill and Helen Janzen, we express appreciation for the love they extended to us by inviting us into their home and into their church fellowship. Also thanks to the La Crete Historical Society and Agricultural Society that entertained us, informed us and fed us, without as much as a collection plate inviting us to share in their expenses. My sense is that this level of generosity is rather characteristic of the La Crete community.

### **Peter Siemens Letter** Introduced by Ron Siemens November, 2003

*Peter Siemens (1765-1845) was my 5th great grandfather and the longest serving Oberschultze for the*



*Chortitza Colonies. For his dedication and service to the Mennonite Communities in South Russia he was awarded a Silver Medallion in 1839 by the Czar.*

*Peter passed this medallion to his grandson Peter Siemens (1823-1912) as a remembrance, and it was to pass on to my grandfather, Peter Siemens (1878-1956).*

*My grandparents had twin boys and my great great grandfather Peter (1823) SUGGESTED the names Petrus and Johann for the twins. This was to honor the fathers of both my grandfather and grandmother.*

*This suggestion was not heeded and the following letters passed to my grandfather which clearly stated he was not honoring his father(s) and therefore would not be receiving the Medallion as he should have. My grandparents next two children were boys and they were named Peter and John but it was too little too late. The Medallion passed out of succession.*

*The lesson was clear—a SUGGESTION from your grandfather was to be heeded and above all "Honor thy father".*

## **Ritzville, WA April 15, 1910**

First, very Dear Grandson, I came to know through daughter Helena that you have not given your twins the names I suggested. It is said in God's Word. "Honor your father and mother so that it goes well with you and you have a long life on earth."

Is this honoring your fathers (both sides)? In the first case, not. You have suggested there are too many Peters in our acquaintances. Tell me where they are? No one other than I and your father and then you. There is almost no Johan.

Therefore, you have made your grandfather's, your father's and your wife's father's name objectionable! A fine honor! Have you indicated what kind of spirit possessed you, or do you believe you will in so doing, make better people of the children? I don't believe it! When with a right heart and eyes you look at the fathers on both sides then you must be ashamed of yourself. You will probably say that Uncle Julius and Jacob have also not been named after their father, yes! They have also shown how they dishonored their father or their own names were not well recognized. Truth be told, objectionably made. I had thought better of you. I thought I wanted to give you my big SILVER MEDALLION that I got from my grandfather as a remembrance. Likewise with you and I, a remembrance from your grandfather. That will now not be your reward. With one token you dishonoured the Siemens name; because to trust in the old ways is not the new custom, because the wide road allows everything! What I have written here is what I think of such children whose father's name isn't good enough anymore.

Well, yes, everyone has with that his own free will; the apostle says I have all strength, but it ...?... all nothing. Why did I get so old? I shall not love myself, no not me, but the Grace of God, which is God's gift to me, that I am permitted to love and thank! God rewards us with the Good and the Right it is said in the Word, "The righteous shall prosper. Yet it required of one, where love is concerned, if one has not love, everything is a tinkling cymbal.

Yes, yes! Dear Peter, I don't want to be angry with you, but the love is diminished! It is said, test everything and keep the good! Do so also with this my writing.

Your Grandfather,  
Peter Siemens

## **Shepherds, Servants and Prophets**

Edited by Harry Loewen Published by Pandora Press 440 pages  
*reviewed by Irene (Epp) Klassen*

A collection of 24 scholarly essays about 24 scholarly leaders by 19 scholarly writers, one of which is Harry Loewen the editor. After the first two chapters, I thought this is not for me—its too deep, too learned, but as I continued to read, there were more familiar names. Amold Dyck, Dietrich H. Epp, B. B. Janz, C.F. Klassen, Some writers are more readable than others, as perhaps the men they wrote about were more or less complex.

It is a cross-section of Russian-Mennonites who have influenced the course of Mennonite people from the latter part of the 19th into the 20th century. Theologians teachers, printers and publishers, poets and artists, a remarkable array of leaders, most of them, prolific writers. Their lives were interwoven even brothers, father and son, contemporaries.

It is quite remarkable how the passion for education drove these people to travel to Germany Switzerland, to North America to all the best universities. A passion for evangelism drove writers to the development of publishing capacity for their works. The passion for self-expression drove the artists to move from place to place.

There were the brothers Johann and Peter Braun who wrote prolifically. The Kroekers, Jacob and Abram established the first Mennonite Publishing House,

Raduga, and influenced many through their publications.

My favorite chapters were the one on John P Klassen, the artist and Gerhard Loewen the poet. I have seen some of Klassen's art - carvings, sculpture and painting. The versatility of the artist and the various life stages are evident in the works. The poetry of Gerhard Loewen depicts his love of nature and the world that God has created, expressing his response to God through his verse.

Acknowledged too is the fact that some Germans/Mennonites at first were quite impressed with National Socialism and some even with Communism. Perhaps they saw it as the true picture of the early Church as described in Acts. People like Walter Quiring who espoused National Socialism, became editor of the "Bote" and through that medium, influenced his readers, and stirred up considerable controversy. There was David Schellenberg and David J. Penner, confirmed Communist and anti-Menno who attacked many aspects of Mennonite life. Why would these be included? They definitely did have an impact on Mennonite thinking.

Names? How many Beniamins Heinchs Peters, Abrahams, Davids are there in Mennonite history? All Biblical! The fact that for safety reasons during the anti-Semitic period in Germany, Jacob Quiring changed his name to Walter. That Abram Dyck changed his name to Arnold, is a notable feature of Mennonite history.

Women? As Loewen says in his preface/introduction, women had not yet been recognized for their accomplishments in the field of leadership. It was interesting to note though, that a few wives were acknowledged for their impact on the life of the husband, and that in several cases it is the daughter of an

important man who has written his life story. Perhaps the next book on Mennonite leaders could include a woman or two.

This book is an interesting and very worthwhile collection of Mennonite leaders of the past, and should probably be in every church library.

## Alberta Profile

### David Boese (1889-1991)

*By Irene (Epp) Klassen*

David Boese was born in 1889, in Prischib S. Russia but his parents soon moved to Paulsheim where he grew up. His mother's death in 1904 was a painful blow for him, his sister and younger brother. They got a new mother when his father married Liese Baergen. In 1921, David was baptized, and a year later was married to Elizabeth Baergen. They had seven children. The Boeses arrived in Canada in 1925 and after living for a short while in Herbert, Saskatchewan, went on to New Brigiden Alberta and then to Chinook in 1927. At Chinook, David Boese was elected to the ministry in 1929 and ordained by Aeltester C.D. Harder in 1931. He served in Chinook as minister and leader for 10 years. The Chinook-Sedalia area suffered severely from the drought conditions and many families, including ministers, left to move to better places. It was a great loss when the Boese family moved to Tofield in 1937.

In Tofield, he continued his ministerial duties and was also active in the construction of the church in 1937. At the retirement of Aeltester David Heidebrecht's, in 1948, Boese was elected as leading minister. During this time he was leader of the church from 1948 - 1955. He was also Sunday School

Superintendent and teacher. Serving as Itinerant Minister (Reiseprediger) for 13 years was a major commitment of that time. It meant that he was away from home a great deal, visiting mostly in the Mennonite settlements in northern Alberta wherever a minister's services were required. He tried to visit each group at least twice a year and more if necessary.

In winter he visited congregations for Bibelbesprechungen (Bible Studies). He also became involved in the work of the Conference of Mennonites in Alberta, serving, on the Executive as Vice Chairman of the Conference of Mennonites in Alberta (1954), (1963), on the Missions Committee for 6 years, as well as on Nominations Committee for three years.

He enjoyed farming and had a special innovative ability with machinery. He was often able to repair, replace and adapt where necessary. As did so many other active Lay Ministers, Boese said that without the support of his wife and family he could not have accomplished what he did. The children add that they never heard their mother complain about being left alone so much

He loved music and his children tell of family time spent singing.

In 1957 David Boese suffered his first heart attack. They retired from active farming in 1960 and moved into Tofield. The Boeses celebrated their Golden (1972) and their 60<sup>th</sup> (1982) wedding anniversaries where all seven children were present. He was loved and respected by all.

David Boese passed away in 1991 after a long and full life. (From information given by David Jr. and Margaret Boese (David

*Boese had a part of an ear missing and we as children used to wonder what had happened.)*

**In her journal, Elizabeth Boese records their emigration story.**

"As times in Russia became more difficult, we were robbed of our worldly goods, and our religious freedom became endangered; one looked and prayed seriously for means to go abroad. After much effort, the Lord opened up the way to Canada, and Russia conceded that all refugees and others who had lost everything were permitted to emigrate. We belonged to the refugee group, because I, Elizabeth was a refugee from the Terek region.

"After much preparation, on September 25, 1925, we celebrated our farewell in the worship service in our home village. For many this was the last time they saw each other in this life. On September 26, David's parents took us to the Stunevo Station, from which we were supposed to leave. A large group of people had gathered to bid us farewell. The train was very late so we had to wait all day under the open sky. The time of waiting was spent in singing and private conversation with loved ones. Entire choirs had come from the village to sing some farewell songs.

"When finally, towards evening a train arrived with three freight cars, some of us could load our belongings. It was now dark and the moon shone in the sky - a quiet, beautiful evening. No one knew when the rest of the cars would come so, gradually by midnight all those who were not emigrating, went back home.

"Finally at 2 am, the train came with more cars, and the rest could all board. It became cool and the children were sleepy and crying. About 26 - 30 people were loaded

into each car. We traveled together with our luggage. At 2:30 everything was loaded and the train pulled slowly away from the station, as we tore ourselves way from our loved ones and our homeland.

"The next morning we arrived at Lichtenau, the last station in the Mennonite colony. The people were just leaving to attend the Thanksgiving service. Some friends and relatives came to say goodbye. From there we went from station to station, over large bridges and through thick forests, until we arrived at the border of Latvia, Sebesh, on the morning of October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Here our remaining currency was exchanged, our luggage was searched, and at 5 pm we finally crossed the border. It was a tense moment, for many of us did not trust the Russian officials not to keep us back. But the train went slowly through the Red Gate with the large red flag. On the other side of the gate was only a small cottage. The train stopped, the Russian officials got off, and the foreign officials took over the train. (It was said that some threw their sandals back as they passed through the Red Gate.) At the first station in Latvia we were all transferred to another train with all our things. It was raining hard, but everyone was happy to be safely across the border. On October 4<sup>th</sup>, at noon we arrived at Riga, the port city.

"Now a good many things changed. The CPR officials controlled and took care of everything. We disembarked at 2 pm and were brought to large bathrooms, where our clothes and bedding were taken and disinfected. We were taken to a large dormitory where we stayed for a week, but were free to go into the city and see everything. We bought clothes and instruments. We all had to come before the doctors to be examined

for infectious diseases.

"On October 11<sup>th</sup> we boarded the ship where we each got a cabin. The things we did not need were loaded into the bottom of the ship. Before we left we were all given food to eat. Finally the ship left shore, crossed the Baltic Sea to the Wilhelm canal. Here there was so much to see - Germany on both sides and Switzerland (?) at a distance. We went under large bridges as well as through draw-bridges. Later on the North Sea, a storm hit and the ship rocked a lot and the waves came together on the deck. Most of the people were seasick

"On October 16<sup>th</sup>, we arrived at the port of Southampton, England, but we could not enter the port because measles had broken out on the ship. We had to transfer to a small boat to enter the harbour. From there we went by train to a large house where we had to bathe and were once more examined by a doctor before returning to the train. We arrived in Liverpool and were soon loaded onto a large ship, the C.P. R S.S. Montnairn. The first days on the ocean there was a storm, but from there it went very well.



We had a nice room and good food. In the evening we always had worship where we sang and played instruments. After a week we came to Quebec where we received a friendly welcome and each one received a Gospel of John. We were again examined by a doctor, were given food to eat and then continued on by train into Canada.

"We were distributed into all provinces. Our destination was Herbert Saskatchewan, arriving there on October 28<sup>th</sup>. We were taken to church right away, were given food and a house to live in. We lived in Herbert until December 13<sup>th</sup>, when we went to a farm in Alberta, arriving there on December 19<sup>th</sup>. The Lord has protected us on our travels. To Him many thanks."

These excerpts were taken from the journal written by Elizabeth Boese in 1925, translated into English by Anne and Rudy Regehr in 1991

## **Maria Pauls (1901-1996)**

*By Irene (Epp) Klassen*

"Yesterday is gone, and tomorrow may never come, so live today knowing that God will be there in all of your tomorrows." That is how Maria Pauls began her memoirs, and that is the philosophy she lived by. At the time of her death, just nine days before her 95th birthday, her mind was still active and she looked forward to the "tomorrow" when she would be reunited with her husband Wilhelm who had passed away in 1991.

Maria Pauls was a preacher's wife and helpmate in the old-fashioned sense of the word, but she was also a woman with her own identity as a leader. She and

her husband were a team where each strengthened and stimulated each other.

Maria Froese was born on January 15, 1901 in the beautiful village of Rosengart in the Ukraine. She was a teacher's daughter and after she trained as a Kindergarten teacher, was able to help her father in the classroom. Later she went on to Chortitza to work in the Hospital there.

It was there that she met Wilhelm Pauls. They were married and two years later they immigrated to Canada with their infant son, Bill.

After a short stay in Manitoba, they continued on to Alberta and settled on a farm south of New Brigiden. From there the journey took them a bit farther west to a farm just out of Sedalia.

At Sedalia, while trying to eke out a living, Wilhelm was elected to the ministry in 1931 and was ordained in 1934. A son, Erwin was born with a hare-lip and deft palate. After several months of indecision, the child was taken to the Children's Red Cross Hospital in Calgary. Corrective surgery was unsuccessful, and little Erwin died. Another child, a beautiful little girl, Serena was born and brought much joy into the home. But the joy was short-lived. Serena died of Diphtheria at the age of three.

In 1937, Pauls was called to teach at the emerging Menno Bible Institute at Didsbury. As the teacher's wife, and with her gentle concern for girls, she became the confidante and mentor for the students. Her caring and understanding strengthened the teachings of the classroom. The door was always open for homesick students, and there was always coffee or milk and fresh baked buns and sometimes, even cake.

In 1948 when the Alberta Women's Conference was organized, and a strong dedicated leader was needed, Maria Pauls was that person.

She became its president, brought the conference into reality, helped write up a constitution, and led it through its birthing pains for ten years. She may not have been the world's most prolific quilter, but she was a strong leader and supporter of Missions. "As a united group, we can accomplish much more for Missions than as individuals," was her philosophy.

Through her husband's ministry and her own involvement, they got to know and entertain many missionaries. When a missionary woman visited, Maria would invite her into the kitchen while the meal was being prepared, and she always had a new apron to give her guest if she offered to help. The apron would then be given to the guest to take with her. Maria Pauls did not keep track of the number of aprons that were spread into far away mission fields in that way.

To her dying day, she maintained an avid interest in missions and in the Alberta Women in Mission, not only in the provincial, but on the Canadian and General Conference level. Her support for successive leaders was strong and her criticism was always constructive.

The Pauls' hospitality shone and their guests were many. Often Wilhelm entertained with his wonderful readings of the old German Classics, or the *Koop en Bua* antics by Arnold Dyck. He also shared his own poetry, some serious and some quite hilarious. His wife was his strongest critic and occasionally, when she did not approve, she would gently chide, "Aber Will..." When *Der Bote* would arrive at their house, he would read it aloud, to her while she worked. She said with a twinkle, "I would rather have him

read to me than help me with the dishes." She herself enjoyed reading and read prolifically, often late into the night.

The sadness at the loss of her two children and later her daughter-in-law, did not make her bitter. It enabled her to underhand the pain of others

When Maria Pauls realized that her end was near, she planned her funeral to be just like that of her husband. When the family hesitated, in the planning, she handed them the piece of paper, "Here, this is what I want." In her quiet soft-spoken way, she was still in charge. She was buried beside her husband on January 10, just five days short of her 95th birthday.

Marta Pauls was *Mariechen* to her contemporaries, "Aunt Mary" to her nieces and nephews, but for most people she was always "Mrs. Pauls"

## A Remembrance Day Speech

By Peter Penner

*This is the text of an address that I gave to a town-wide Remembrance Day Service in Sackville, NB, on November 11, 1982 at the request of the chaplain of the local Legion, the Rev. George Lemmon. On that occasion I chose to tell my story in the third person. Since 20 years have gone by, I have done some slight editing.*

While it would be most appropriate to speak to the issues raised by the peace movement of today, I have chosen to remember with you what life was like for those who took a different viewpoint [during the Second World War] and to tell you what their choice was. As this question of war and peace has interested me [a professional historian of British and European

history] for a long time, I kept a file on four young men of one congregation who turned 18 1/2 in 1943. Would they go to war as Mennonites or choose the church's official position of nonresistance (Christian pacifism)? There was the clear option for them to choose the Mackenzie King Government's "alternative service". That is, [as Mennonites] they could choose military exemption.

The reason for telling about these four and then singling out one is to show that Mennonite young men were divided on the issue of peace and war. Here were four close friends, members of the same young people's group. What would they do?

One joined the RCAF, returned safely and has become a wealthy contractor. Two evaded the issue. One assumed he would be rejected for medical reasons, and the other was so certain he would get deferral for farm work that he never declared himself a conscientious objector. Both have been very successful, one in engineering, the other in fruit farming. At the time I thought their choice was a cop-out!

Only one claimed military exemption and awaited his fate. As expected, he soon received a letter stating that he should report to the BC Forest Service, Green Timbers, BC. Enclosed was a CPR ticket one way from his hometown in Ontario to New Westminster, B.C. When he inspected the ticket closely, he saw it was dated December 23, 1943. As he recounts the story later, he found himself eating his Christmas dinner alone rolling into Winnipeg, on the second day out. Upon arriving in BC. he was soon taken to Vancouver Island, to join the fire-fighting and tree-planting units, first at Camp Hill 60 Dunearn, then at Lake Cowichan. He was outfitted with logger's boots, rubberized

outerwear to keep off the rain, and a tree planter's pick.

In this way he chose trees.

These fellows at Lake Cowichan received room and board, and 50 cents a day. When the camps were closed in March 1944, they were allowed to work on farms during the summer and in industry during the winter. The one I've been following joined two other young men, already known to him, at Canada Packers in Toronto, where they spent the winter of 1944-45. Guess where they were put to work? In the hide cellar. All of their wages except \$25 a month went to the Red Cross until they were demobilized from Alternative Service.

Those who have recently traveled to Lake Cowichan, the scene of that tree planting in the 1940s, tell me that those trees now stand at about 90 feet tall and will soon be harvested for construction purposes. (It is estimated that conscientious objectors, during the War years, planted about 17 million trees in various parts of the country mostly in BC.)

You may ask, how was this possible and seemingly necessary for some? Mennonites along with the Society of Quakers have always been pacifist, and were informed on the issue by their home congregations' s understanding of the Sermon on the Mount. It was all part and parcel of their heritage.

In Czarist Russia, where our forbears lived, military exemption was part of the Privilegium (a designated number of privileges) granted first by Czarina Catherine [the Great] and confirmed by Czar Paul, in 1796, at about the same time as Mennonites in Ontario (Upper Canada) were receiving similar privileges. It was the

introduction of universal military conscription in the 1870s that brought 17,000 Mennonites from Russia to Canada and the U.S.A. It was the Russian Revolution and communist regime that drove our families, these four and many hundreds of others, to Canada in the 1920s.

Between the wars and by 1940 the Ontario Mennonites and Quakers had formed an association known as the Historic Peace Churches. Their representation in Ottawa was acknowledged as valid because they claimed the traditional military exemption given to Mennonites on entirely biblical grounds. Armed with a certificate from that body any young Mennonite in Ontario could get exemption without a hearing.

In other parts of Canada provision was made for a non-combatant medical service within the Army and just over 200 Mennonites took this option. This small number is to be accounted for by the fact that the arrangements were very slow in forthcoming. In the U.S.A. the army rejected this form of alternative service.

You may say, given the protected and privileged position of the Mennonites, that they never have come to grips with the issue of war. How wrong you are. Mennonites throughout their history have had to come to grips with war, anarchy, destruction of their property, and personal assault in a way that Canadians who remained at home have not.

The Mennonite anti-war stance was made in the 16th century, in the very midst of war. In Frederick the Great's Prussia in the 18th century they dwelt in a warfare state and were asked to leave for reasons of state but were then welcomed in Russia. In Russia (the Ukraine actually) the Mennonite

villages lay in the path of Red armies fighting the Whites in the Civil War following Lenin's takeover, and were laid waste by the Anarchist Machno and his roving bands (1917-1919). There was the knock on the door, the pistol at the head, and the demand, first for food for the men and fodder for the horses. Next, they wanted the villagers' horses, and wagons, and eventually their women. Non-compliance meant the trigger, or the tearing away of the father, leaving the women defenseless.

In this way Mennonites quite literally faced the question often asked of them: What would you do, if you were attacked? They responded two ways: One group said we must organize our own self-defense against these marauding bands. They did, under the aegis of the White armies, and the results were shattering. It was a complete denial of their principles. They were already too much identified with the wealthy classes, and the retaliation was all the more fierce in a war that the Whites lost.

The other group said: No, we must not resist the aggressor: we must "heap coals of fire on his head," we must "turn the other cheek."

Some Mennonites later and in Canada were more influenced by the second group's thinking, while others by the self-defenders. Among the four of whom I have been talking, two were sons of men who had taken military exemption in Russia, and two were sons of those who had fought in self-defense.

Before you say, "What if everyone took that position, what would happen to our country?" let me say you need hardly fear, for those who actually took this nonresistant position were few in number indeed. Of about 660,000 persons who received deferment in Canada on grounds they were

needed at home, only 4 per cent were conscientious objectors. In all there were only about 11,000 COs in Canada (not only Mennonites) during World War II. Almost as many Mennonites joined the Forces as claimed military exemption.

While most Mennonite denominations still hold officially to the peace position, the issue has seldom been raised since the end of the Vietnam War. While many individuals are actively engaged in dimensions of the peace movement, such as Project Ploughshares, yet the denomination in which the four young men found themselves in 1943 cannot be said to be an integral part of today's peace movement.

I can appreciate the position taken by Gordon Stewart at McGill in 1940. He had been minister of Sackville United Church from 1971 to 1981. He suffered expulsion for refusing to take military training. When he joined a fire-fighting unit, he discovered there were many fine Christians in the army and many scoundrels among the pacifists. They tended to be judgmental about those who took the military option. His criticism is valid. It all adds up to this that those who in their personal lives don't live up to the position they take on biblical grounds have compromised themselves.

Today, of course, it is imperative that the Mennonite position be a positive one, in service and the search for peace, but the time may come when another conventional war will bring the issue home. As our leading theologian John Howard Yoder [Indiana] wrote recently: 'The new Mennonite vision [as well as the old] proclaims far more than the refusal of military service, but at least it cannot be satisfied with less than that.'

It is appropriate for me to close with a poem written in 1944 by Inspector Ben Warkentin when his son, Flying Officer John Howard Warkentin, was shot down over France. Ben, now retired in New Brunswick, being the son of a prominent Mennonite pastor in Manitoba, served in a British non-combatant unit in World War I, and was a reservist in World War II. It is a noble way for us to remember those who did not come back. The poem was published in the Grade VI Manitoba Reader:

"These cold, concise, official words [the letter giving notice of someone killed in action] do but convey / The fact that he, my son, no longer breathes this air: / And that this Mother Earth has taken back the cloak / That some time made him tall, and strong, and passing fair, / He did not lose his life' Say that of those poor souls / Whose blund'ring feet walk here and there, and find no goal. / He did not lose, but proudly gave! His was the wish, / The thought, the will. the daring heart, the steadfast soul. / He is not missing, though his voice will not again / Be heard in instant answer to the bugle's call, / Not missing, - no, - but missed; in such few years, / He made so many friends: he gave his smile to all. / And who believes him dead? Not you, nor I; we know / His spirit walks among the clouds his feet have trod: / We know he lives, and will forever live, within / The hearts of those he loved, and in the heart of God.

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## Congregational Archivists have Access to Records invaluable

## for Historical Research

By *Judith Rempel*

### The Honour & the Problem

Well, somehow at the end of that meeting you found yourself recognized and/or wrangled into one of the congregational volunteer supports known as the church librarian / historian / archivist. Possibly because you're a professional in one of those fields, you're a teacher, or .... you're simply seen as "the bookish one".

While the honour of being selected for a special role like this in a congregation is mighty fine, you may be wondering just what it is that you're supposed to do - and may even be having a hard time figuring out what your predecessor did.

Hopefully this short article will help you sort out that role, give you some ideas about initiatives (projects or simply organizing the many boxes of records/books) that you can begin to do, and we'll point you to some resources that will help you do the assorted tasks.

### Who should keep the records?

Seems a silly question doesn't it—you've already agreed to this task. And, you should feel encouraged to keep at it. Even unwelcome assignments sometimes turn out to be amazingly enjoyable and rewarding experiences.

There really are three record-keeping roles (hats) for any congregation: **Librarian** (keeper of the published books, magazines & music), **Historian** (writer of the articles/stories about the past), and **Archivist** (keeper of the unpublished papers and records).

Churches vary in membership size and interest in the published and unpublished materials that they have - so you may have only one or many volunteers looking after these three roles. But, it is important to

know that all three roles exist and that there are different duties that go with each hat. Think of the old song "My hat it has three corners, three corners has my hat....". If you fill more than one role, you should consciously turn your 'invisible hat' so that only ONE of those corners is in the forefront at any time.

### Librarian

In some ways, this is the easiest role to understand because we've all gone to public or school libraries. We've browsed the shelves for books of casual interest, or used a catalogue (card or electronic) to find a book or magazine that helps us with a subject that we're researching. So - we see some of the products of library work: shelves or beautifully organized books organized by subject, labeled by call number to keep them in order.

But, now YOU're the librarian and you have no idea where they got those call numbers. Well, in the case of very new and widely published books, the call numbers are pre-printed inside the front pages of books along with subject headings - just to make the tasks of librarians easier. You'll actually often find two call number alternatives. BX8103 is an example of Library of Congress (LC) cataloguing (used widely by educational institutions) and 261.3 is an example of Dewey Decimal (used by public libraries).

You can use either system - and prepare a card catalogue or database software to house the core information about all the books: Author, Title, Year of Publication, City of Publication, Publisher, & subject(s).

Or if your collection is small, you can simply organize the books on the shelf in subject or alphabetical (by author or title)

order, and apply removable labels to the shelves to identify the beginnings of subject-sections or alphabetical-sections.

Dewey Decimal system is easier to implement than the LC system because there are one-volume guides to Dewey Decimal cataloguing. Library of Congress guides are very expensive and hard to obtain.

You could also request an appointment with a public librarian in your community and ask them to show you the Religious Studies section of the library and how they do the call number and subject-assignment tasks. Another neat trick is to go to the Canadian Mennonite University Library website <<http://mercury.uwinnipeg.ca/search-S2/>> and just copy how they've catalogued the books in your library!

### Historian

The historian in a congregation often hasn't been designated, but is simply a person who likes to write or tell stories about people, events or objects in the history of the congregation. It's this person's job to capture the Whether designated or not, this person Both have great value, but when written, the

### Archivist

Of the three roles, this is the most elusive. The archivist's task is to acquire, preserve, and provide access to the "papers" of the congregation after they are no longer in active use. These papers include the constitution/bylaws, deeds, financial statements, annual reports, minutes, correspondence, plans, bulletins, and membership lists among others.

The records should be organized according to the function that they perform (governance, membership matters, financial

control, specific committees, etc.) and stored in date order (most recent on top). Keep Files a maximum of .5" thick.

Once a year, the congregational archivist should review which records should be transferred into the MHSA's Archives for more thorough preservation treatment.

### Resources

The MHSA has obtained copies of the hard-to-find 30 p. booklet called *Heritage Preservation: A Resource Book for Congregations* by David A. Haury and jointly published by the MB and GC Conferences in 1993. This is an essential reference book for any Congregational Archivist (or historian or librarian filling the archival role). Very clear to read, large print, plenty of room for marginal notes. Answers key questions such as: WHO should keep the records, WHAT records should be kept, and WHERE/HOW should the records be kept.

For those interested, the MHSA's *Policy & Procedures Manual* is online as a pdf file that can be downloaded <[www.mennonites.ca/mhsa/archives/policy\\_procedure\\_manual\\_23apr2003.pdf](http://www.mennonites.ca/mhsa/archives/policy_procedure_manual_23apr2003.pdf)>. Appendix VI offers a suggestion of how you might structure your records and on what schedule you might transfer them to the MHSA.

The MHSA Library & Archives Coordinator, Judith Rempel is available by telephone (evenings 7-9pm: (403-283-0143) and e-mail ([queries@mennonites.ca](mailto:queries@mennonites.ca)) to respond to individualized assistance in organizing your records and/or depositing your records with the MHSA. If she's unable to help adequately, she'll connect you with other resource persons who specialize in the situation you have.

## MHSA Archives &

## Library is Moving and we Need Your Help

By Judith Rempel

\* drawing needed

MCC Alberta has decided that they want to form a Mennonite gathering place in Alberta where various organizations are present and where our Meetings feel welcome to participate in events and opportunities. They've decided that the perfect place for this is the location of the present MCC Thrift Store in NE Calgary. Because we are in that building now—this involves us too.

To accommodate this vision, they will begin the building of a 3-storey expansion on the West side of the existing Thrift Store building in early 2004. The main floor will allow a needed expanded Thrift Store retail area. The second and third floors will house MCC and MMI administrative offices respectively. The second floor will be tied to the existing mezzanine floor where the MHSA is housed to provide adequate second-floor space for MCC.

However, this means that we will need to move 'east' by about 30 feet. While there will be a bit of disruption during the move, we should be able to simply move our items on trollies and dollies—and not need to box or store any of our reference or archival materials at all. And, because our archival materials are housed in a locked room, we can simply add a pastic dust barrier during construction so that those materials are not negatively impacted by the construction activities. The volume of space that we have in the new space will be virtually identical, but somewhat differently configured.

Some of the advantages to the MHSA in this exercise are that we too will be part of that "gathering

place" - a role we already foster in our monthly genealogy meetings (3rd Saturday each month, from 1:30-4:00 pm), and opportunities for drop-in research (every Saturday 10:00-4:30).

Our archival room will really start to become a professionally-understood 'vault' in that it will not only be locked, but have the potential to be environmentally controlled in terms of stable temperature and humidity at levels recommended by the industry.

The build out by MCC will include an elevator—so they and we will both become much more physically accessible. The elevator will service all floors, making visitors with tricky knees or donors with heavy boxes of documents and books being able to get to us with much less effort.

One substantial impact on MHSA is that while MCC will look after us by doing the "roughed-in" construction, we will need to do our own construction work for inner walls, flooring, doors and any additional furnishings needed by the newly configured space. We have also agreed that we will begin to increase our rent to approach market rental rates (presently we are only paying a token percentage of the market rate).

We are now planning how to manage the move to greater control and responsibility for our space with the help of a Fund-raising Committee (Board Member, David Wiebe-Neufeldt, Chair). Dave Hildebrand, MHSA member, genealogist and retired contractor, will oversee the construction under guidelines identified by the Archives Advisory Committee (Ted Regehr, Chair)

We are providing you with an opportunity to add a donation to your membership renewal (which is due in December) on our back page.

When we do our own construction work, MHSA must take the responsible step to plan for professional quality archival and library conditions. Preparing for archival-safe conditions is more expensive than for standard construction. For example, wallboard must be fire retardant; shelving, paints and floor materials must not "give off" gases that are acid-containing; temperature and humidity control potential must be pre-wired into the walls/ceiling, necessary sprinkler systems and heating pipes cannot have the potential of bursting onto the collection, so must be housed in the walls/ceiling/floor in less traditional ways; and in the interests of long term conservation of space, we must start thinking about compact, mobile archival shelving

We will be specifically looking for help with the following items:

- Wallboard, Doors & Flooring
- Display case
- Kitchen cabinet & coat rack
- "Sweat equity"
- Additional steel shelving or mobile shelving
- Cash donations

We are just now getting detailed estimates of cost, but by shopping carefully and employing as

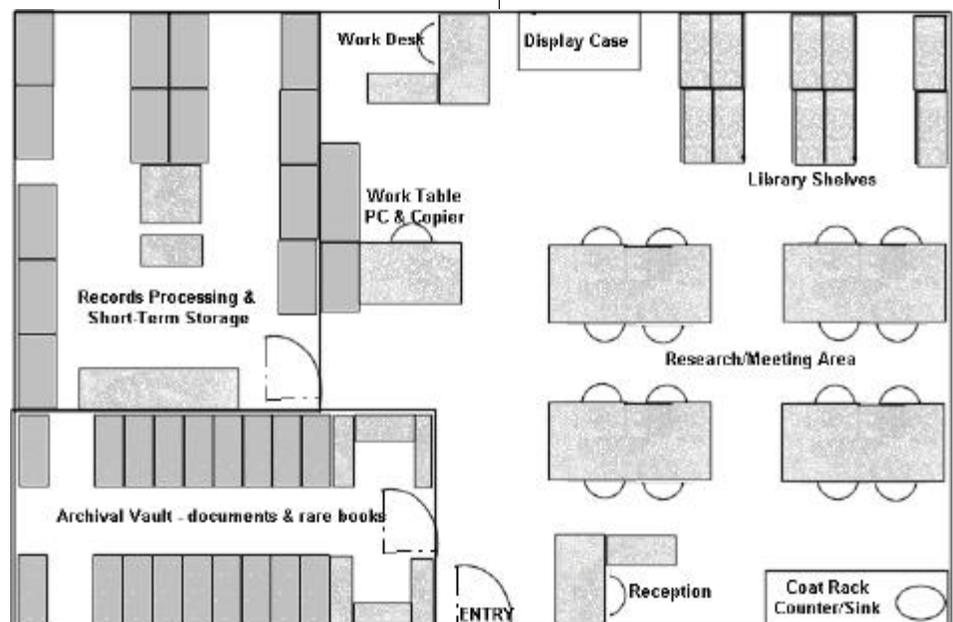
much "sweat equity" as possible, we think that the cost will be \$30,000. Because we have been getting our administrative and archival plans in order, the MHSA has not been actively fundraising until now and has no nest egg to turn to. Our annual budget for the past three years has been \$6-10,000 - so the fundraising goal is a substantial one for us.

Preserving our history is a collective responsibility along with a lot of other good inter-Mennonite work. We hope that our supporters and members will remember the MHSA with their 2003 and 2004 donations so that we can develop this space in a way that honours the documents of our past.

## MHSA Archives Fundraising Drive

*By David Wiebe-Neufeldt*

In 2004, the MHSA Archives will be moving to a new home. Due to a planned expansion to the Mennonite Central Committee building, the archives is needing to relocate to another part of the building. The new area will be larger and include better climate



**MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF ALBERTA  
ADVANCE REGISTRATION  
for the  
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
to be held in  
EDMONTON, ALBERTA  
FRIDAY AND SATURDAY, APRIL 23 AND 24, 2004**

Plans include a Friday afternoon tour of interesting Mennonite activity sites, Friday evening sessions in Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church and all Saturday sessions in First Mennonite Church.

Presenters will include Dr. John B. Toews, Professor at Regent College, Vancouver, BC, Tena Wiebe, author, and, Lorne Buhr, retired Alberta Legislature Librarian.

Please complete this advance registration form and submit to Dr. Colin Neufeldt, MHSA Chair, NO LATER THAN FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2004. Mail to him at 11620-32A Avenue, Edmonton, AB T6J 3G8. Registrants may e-mail their intentions to [colinneufeldt@snyder.ca](mailto:colinneufeldt@snyder.ca) or they may call him at 1-780-433-2127.

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail address \_\_\_\_\_@\_\_\_\_\_

Number of Persons Planning to Attend: \_\_\_\_\_

Check if planning to participate in Friday afternoon tour starting at 1:00pm

Check if Friday night billets are required

For how many persons \_\_\_\_\_

Special Requirements \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Check if planning to attend the catered Saturday Noon banquet

Number of persons \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE PRICE IS STILL UNDER NEGOTIATION. TICKETS MUST BE PURCHASED IN ADVANCE SO CATERER CAN PLAN THE MEAL. NO BANQUET TICKETS TO BE SOLD AT THE DOOR!

## Membership Application Form

Memberships are due fall each year.

Newsletters are issued in spring and fall.

Mail membership form and cheque to:

MHSA

2946—32 Street NE

Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

### Enclosed is my contribution of:

\$20     \$50     \$100     \$500     Other \_\_\_\_\_

Tax receipts will be automatically sent for donations of \$20.00 or more.

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### Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

2946—32 Street NE

Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7

