



Newsletter

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume X, No. 1

August 2007

MHSC and GAMEO Meetings Held in Calgary, Jan 18-20 2007

Peter Penner

It might be of interest for the membership of MHSA to know how the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada/Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopaedia Online (MHSC/GAMEO) meetings planned for January 18-20, as well as the MHSA event on Friday evening, January 19, 2007, at First Mennonite Church, unfolded.

About a year before this MHSC, headquartered in Winnipeg, decided to move around more. Usually these annual meetings alternated between Winnipeg and Waterloo. We in Alberta have had one of the first of these traveling meetings. We will probably not get one again for some years, though I would not like to predict a timetable. Quebec has been added to the mix, we have an American GAMEO partner as a result of having gone global, and so the rotation could be quite extensive. It could be eight years, if you missed this one.

I do know this, that everyone who came thought ours in Calgary

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Mennonite Beginnings in Calgary

By Irene Klassen

In the 1930s during the Depression and drought, which affected the recently immigrated Mennonites from Russia so severely, many young people came to the city to find work. For the men it was extremely difficult for they just added to the long lines of other unemployed men. However the women or girls were more fortunate, and found work as domestic help in homes of the less affected *Engländer* (all non-Mennonites were referred to as *Engländer* whether they were or not). The girls would live in the homes, and earn \$10-12 per month, some of which they sent home to their parents on the farm. Some young women worked for their room and board while attending Normal School (teacher training) or Business College. Many came, spent a few years and left again, some to take up careers, some to get married. They came from General Conference and Mennonite Brethren homes and communities.

On Thursdays, their day off, the girls met for fellowship in various places such as the YWCA. Ministers from their home communities, if they were passing through Calgary, knew that, and they would meet them there for services and/or messages from home. For several years, the Peter B. Epps, who had come to Calgary in the early 1930s, opened up their home as a meeting place. The girls rented a room for \$5 a month and it actually became the first *Mädchenheim*.

The folks at home eventually became concerned about the spiritual welfare of these young people living in the big city, and requested the Conferences to send ministers, mostly from Didsbury, on a regular basis. Sunday services were held in various small halls or in the Lighthouse

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Fall Gathering of MHSA Members

Time & Date: 9:00 a.m., Saturday, October 20, 2007

Location: Linden, Alberta

The MHSA invites all members and their friends you to its annual fall gathering. From 9 am - noon, we will hear about the history of the Church of God in Christ Mennonite (Holdeman) and the Mennonite Brethren Church in the Linden area.

Following lunch, participants may either join the Linden quilters or a group doing some local touring. There will be a small fee for lunch and an opportunity to purchase an MHSA membership, Mennonite books, or make a donation to the MHSA.

This event is being held in conjunction with the Mysteries of Grace and Judgment event which is scheduled for that evening. For more information, or to register for this gathering, please contact Colin Neufeldt (780-433-2127), Lloyd Ratzlaff (403-546-3788) or Henry Goertzen (403-335-8414).

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Editorial

By Dave Toews



It has been said, a person who has no past, has no hope for the future. Author Unknown

“So you’re a Toews,” remarks our confident 22 year old chopper pilot, “My grandmother was a Toews.” My wife

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Marion and I are about to board the bright orange four-seater Robinson R22 Mountain View Helicopter. And Phil Hannah, the great grandson of Cornelius C. Toews of Linden, Alberta wants to play the Mennonite Game! We have just purchased our tickets and signed the waivers, Phil knows our last name so has the advantage. “I don’t think we have any Toews relatives around Linden,” I reply.

Blue River, BC lies between the Cariboo Mountains on the West and the Monashees to the East. We will do the 20 minute Grizzly Hut Tour. We get instructions, don our head sets and soon are airborne. The flight is magnificent; we see the hut, the checkered clear cuts, and the high mountain lakes. We marvel at the beauty of God’s creation. The flight ends all too soon. We thank Phil and say our good-byes. I tell him I’ll check to see whether or not we are related.

After we return from vacation I ask Judith Rempel, MHTSA Library & Archives Coordinator and Grandma CD aficionado, to check if Phil and I are kin. Alas it is not to be, Cornelius C #109300 and David P Toews #463211 are not related. Yet. It would have made a better ending to this story. The game continues unabated. ❖

Chairman’s Corner

By Vince Friesen

Working in the education system, I feel that September is a time of beginnings. Students from Kindergarten to university are starting a new year. Churches also restart many of their programs after a summer break. Many of us get into a routine for the fall and



winter season.

I have been struck by some curious developments at this starting time. One has to do with the last names of students that I meet. Quite often I come across what would be considered an ethnic Mennonite name. I usually cannot help but ask the student about their name and whether there is any Mennonite background. More and more often I am getting the reply that the young individual really does not know anything about his or her background. For many of these young people, they come from families that have lost the Mennonite church connection over the past two or three generations. Some come from families that have gone through divorce or the death of the parent with the Mennonite name. Others come from homes where there is no interest in remembering the past. As I see this happening, I sincerely hope that the Mennonite Historical societies across Canada will be available for these people when and if it becomes important for them to research their roots.

Turning to business matters, I must thank all the people who helped make the spring even in Edmonton a successful occasion. Attendance was reasonably good although one would always want more people attending. Those who were there certainly did get interesting and useful information on DNA testing to determine how people are related. There were also stimulating sessions on Prussian Mennonite settlement as well as the use of the GRANDMA database.

I am also pleased to invite members and other interested individuals to our October 20th event in Linden. Henry Goertzen has

been very successful in getting both the Mennonite Brethren and Holdeman groups to work together to develop an interesting and informative day for us. See invitation on p. 1.

Hope to see you in Linden. ❖

(Continued from page 1)

was a great all-round location for such meetings: near the airport, proximity of hotels, eating places and, this year, favourable weather. Everyone stayed at the nearby Super 8 at about \$25 cheaper per night than the going rate at most airport hotels.

While we could have met in the MHSA Library, it was more comfortable for all our guests from Montreal to Abbotsford – about 15 all told – to be able to use the Board Room of MCC, Alberta. We were offered this as early as last spring. We were also offered all the makings of “coffee time” and everyone appreciated the generous assistance of Abe Janzen and his staff.



The meeting of the Management Committee of GAMEO on Thursday afternoon took the form of a call from Calgary, using a speaker phone, to Bethel College, because none of the designated American Mennonites were able to come. The meetings of the GAMEO Board took place Thursday evening and Friday morning and dealt with a variety of questions, many of which are still in a transitional stage as we move to a larger sphere of coverage, hopefully using a technology that will help the Canadian and American GAMEO teams to work together efficiently.

GAMEO's highest priority, with the help of the American side, is to complete the uploading online of the five volumes of the Mennonite Encyclopaedia (1950s, 1990) by the end of 2008, if not sooner. The Board of MHSC has decided to add one additional member to the GAMEO editorial board from Alberta and Saskatchewan to match what BC, MB and ON regions have had from the beginning. Regional, denominational and gender considerations are to be kept in mind.

Before I tell you about Friday's advertised evening event, here is how the MHSC meetings went. The Executive met Friday afternoon, 1 to 3 PM. Then, to avoid the later rush hour traffic we transferred the whole group to FMC, using four vehicles. Ralph Dahl through his membership was able to make those arrangements for us, and the full Board had its first session between 4 p.m. and about 5:45 p.m.. Judith had ordered in food from the Mennonite Center for Newcomers. Thus we could eat in a relaxed atmosphere at FMC knowing that we were on site for the evening and not worrying about being stuck in traffic.

The remaining session, the Annual Meeting, was held back at MCC on Saturday. In fact, Ken Reddig began at 9:00 a.m. and we continued until about 2:00 p.m., except for a coffee break and a pizza lunch which Judith Rempel ordered in.

Friday evening, the 19th, at 7 PM, as planned, we were at First Mennonite Church (FMC) on Richmond Road, SW, for a unique event. With Judith's help we produced an attractive bulletin: MHSA on the front, a point-form report from MHSA on the back page, and inside our program and an offprint of the congregational song (“For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies”) to be sung after taking up the collection. The singing was most hearty.

Though we were glad for those who came, probably fewer than 150, the number was much closer to Irene Klassen's prediction than to my somewhat naïve expectation. They were a good audience, however, and from the positive remarks, they loved the program: musical entertainment by the well-known and much-loved Corpus Christi Male Chorale led by Dan Bensler, including Amazing Grace, The Old Grandfather's Clock, Eze-

MHSA Book Celebration Their Mark: Their Legacy

Authors: Irene Klassen and some contributing authors (Linda Neufeld Buhr, Frieda Dick, Alan D. Friesen, Anne Harder, Jake Harder, Peter Janzen, Dick Neufeld, John Schellenberg) will be at hand for the celebration of this book that features over 50 biographical essays about Alberta Mennonite leaders.

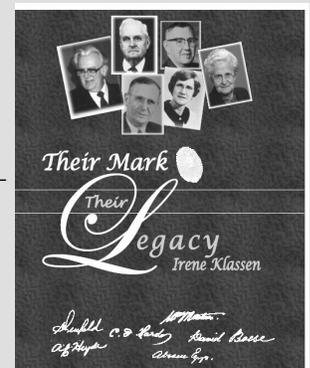
There will be some refreshments on hand but no fee. There will be an opportunity to purchase an MHSA membership, Mennonite books, or make a donation to the MHSA.

Date: Sunday, Oct 28, 2007

Location: First Mennonite Church, 26 Richmond Road SW, Calgary

12:30 p.m. Refreshments with the congregation

2:00 p.m. Book launch





kiel Saw the Wheel and Now the Day is Over! all profoundly well sung. Remember, this Chorale came and sang in support of MHSA.

Three solid history society reports were given: Bert Friesen for GAMEO, Ken Reddig for MHSC and Dave Pankratz for our Alberta

Society. Each presenter tried to cover the main projects of the national and provincial societies and to make sure that those with the Internet understood how to access information and reports.

Early on, perhaps in August, we were contacted about somehow including Dr. Arthur Kroeger, a native of Alberta, and author of his family's history, *Hard Passage: a Mennonite Family's Long Journey from Russia to Canada* into the January event. Ted Regehr, Rudy Wiebe and Ken Reddig had been asked to read the manuscript before publication by the University of Alberta Press, and they thought it was a good idea. We don't often get the opportunity to have someone from a poor immigrant *Russländer* family (1926) who was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship to study at Oxford for a year, who earned a Ph.D. from the University of Alberta, one who served in Government at the deputy level for many years, eventually became Chancellor of the Carleton University, and holder of the Order of Canada, to be our guest. All of this came together that evening when he gave a short but brilliant talk about his family and his growing up years as a "squatter", virtually, on land north east of Calgary, at the tip of the Palliser Triangle. His book was hot off the press, was brought here by Cathie Crooks from the Univer-

sity of Alberta Press and made available at the Reception which followed the program.

As it turned out, the whole program lasted 90 minutes and nearly everyone stayed for the appropriate reception prepared for us by the "Helping Hands" of First Mennonite Church.

On behalf of the Local Arrangements Committee I have written letters of thanks to the Male Chorale, First Mennonite Church and to Abe Janzen and MCC. They all deserve official thanks from the Society.

Ralph Dahl as Treasurer of MHSA gave me permission to tell you that the collection for MHSA on Friday the 19th amounted to \$1,006 and the number of copies of Arthur Kroeger's that were sold that evening, 40 % accruing to us, gave MHSA about \$800. Some additional copies will be available from Irene Klassen at MHSA.

Peter Penner, for Ralph Dahl and Dick Neufeld ❖

(Continued from page 1)

Gospel Mission downtown. As the number of families coming to Calgary increased, they began looking around for a more adequate and permanent location. By 1944 there were several families living here as well as the employed girls, and they, together with the Alberta Conference began seriously looking into the future.

There was the old Scarboro United Church on 17th Avenue, which was used as a hostel or recreation hall for the Armed Forces, since that congregation had built a new church just around the corner. After some negotiation, it was made available on Sundays. Thanksgiving Service was held there in 1945. At this time two important decisions were made

- To ask J.J.Sawatzky, one of the Didsbury preachers who had served fairly regularly, to move to Calgary. The Alberta Conference paid him \$35/month for expenses.
- To purchase the old Scarboro Church which was available for \$4,500

With the help of the General Conference Mission Board, and a bank loan of \$1,150, the old Church was purchased, and regular Sunday services began. However due to the previous arrangement, it was several months before the hostel was discontinued, so the building was not available during

the week. The John J. Sawatzky family moved to Calgary into an old home near the church. On Sunday morning, church people would arrive early to clean up after Saturday night's revelries. The Sawatzky boys, Andrew and Abe, tell of cleaning up cigarette butts and beer bottles, but one of their rewards was that when they checked under the couch cushions, they often found coins and of course could keep them. Attendance fluctuated around 35 adults and 15-20 children – about 14 families.

On May 29, 1946 the church was officially organized with 27 members signing the copy of the constitution, in a record book. This Constitution was based on that of

the Westheimer Church at Rosemary with a few changes. Those who signed this document were more-or-less permanent residents and a few employed girls that planned to stay in Calgary. There were John J. and Maria Sawatzky, their sons Andrew and Abe, J. J. and Agnes Klassen and their daughter

Nettie, Jacob and Elizabeth Reimer, Martin and Sara Loewen, I.B and Helena Dyck, Gerhard and Erna Wiebe, A.J. and Maria Loewen, Tina Loewen, Mrs.

Margaretha Neufeld, Jacob and Betty Tiessen, Heinrich and Justina Loewen, P.F. and Margareta Sawatzky, Peter Neufeld and Mrs. Anna Epp. The Martin Loewens were the first to ask for, and receive a certificate of transfer when they moved to Abbotsford B.C. in 1947. Others have transferred, but most have passed away by now. Of those first members, Anna Epp, (Mrs. Peter B.) was the last one, she passed away in 1997.

Bible Study and Choir Practice were held on Thursdays, because it was still the day off for the employed girls. Sawatzky felt responsible to those employed girls and church schedules often catered to their schedule. On Sunday morning the choir would sing to a handful of older folks and children, and then sit down to become a part of the congregation. The children were divided into three classes and the teachers taught Bible stories in a corner of the room. When an elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Lepp joined the church they lived in a tiny room behind the stage and in return, were caretakers. (These

were the grandparents of Alma Lepp).

The first wedding was a Golden Wedding, the Abram Loewens. The second, a silver wedding, the Jacob Reimers and then finally a “real” wedding - Nettie Klassen married Dietrich Janzen from Dundurn Saskatchewan. In 1947 two persons were baptized – John Klassen and Mary Sawatzky (later became Mrs. Peter Dick). In 1949, Nick Wedel moved here from BC and was ordained as the first deacon.

The fledgling congregation was struggling along and gradually taking form, when in 1948-49, the first immigrants began to arrive from war torn

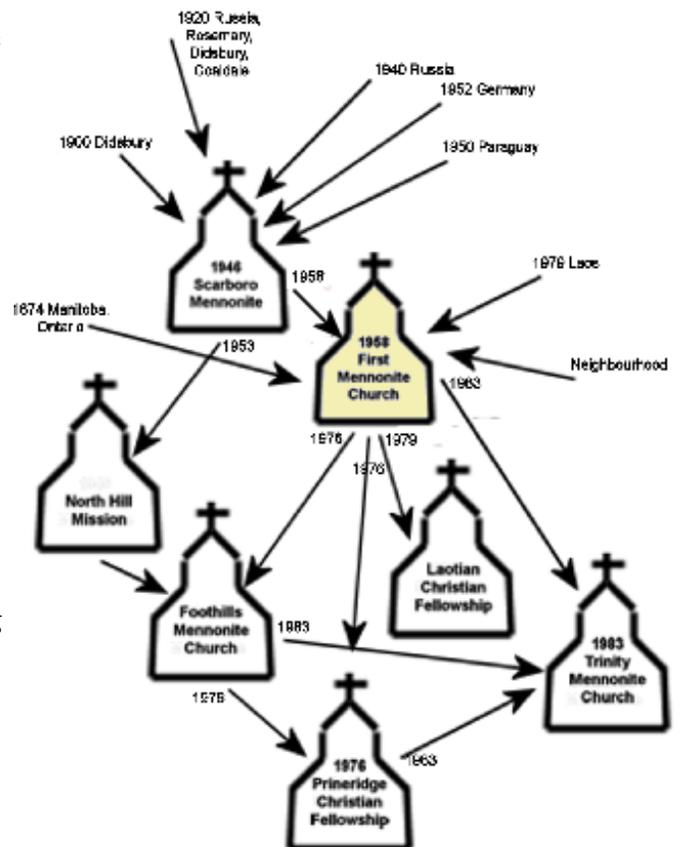
Europe – Russia via Germany. Many of these were young women or widows, so an official *Mädchenheim* was established when the Sawatzkys built a new home which was shared with the women. The Alberta Conference assisted with \$2,000 for furnishings. About 24 women spent at least some time there

After some negotiation, [the old Scarboro United Church on 17th Ave. ... was made available on Sundays. Thanksgiving Service was held there in 1945. ... With the help of the General Conference Mission Board, and a bank loan of \$1,150, the old Church was purchased, and regular Sunday services began.

while Sawatzky found work for them. He always said it was a pleasure placing them in homes, for they had established a good reputation. There were exceptions, but most of the girls were treated well and since much of the work involved children, they were able to learn English at the same time. Besides working in homes, some got employment in a little restaurant downtown. The Teakettle Inn hired only Christian girls and was closed on Sundays. During this post-war era, the young men were also able to find work in construction; this was the beginning of prosperity for them as well as for the nation.

Stories are told of the young men living in either the basement or the garage of the Litowchenkos, another immigrant family, who was building a home near the Sawatzky’s *Mädchenheim*.

The next few years saw many new arrivals. They came from Russia, Germany and Paraguay, as well as from the surrounding communities of Rosemary, Didsbury, Coaldale and others. As the city grew, so did the church.



With so many young people in the city it was natural that there were romances and weddings. In time there was an increase in the Sunday school population. Jake Krahn was the first Sunday school superintendent. Material was sort of haphazard; whatever the teachers could find they would use. Some material was published in *Der Bote* for that purpose. Eventually the Conference-sponsored and produced "Faith and Life" material was adopted. No records were kept and the money collected on Sundays was kept in a jar and disbursed as needed to some mission project.

The women had organized a *Verein* (a fellowship or society) even before the church was officially born. They later chose the name *Einigkeit* (Unity) *Verein*. It was very German and very Foreign Mission minded. They did quilting and sewing for overseas. Every year they had an auction sale of items they had made and the proceeds were largely sent to Overseas Missions. Missionaries were important and the women kept in touch by sending letters and parcels. It was a highlight when missionaries came to report.

In 1953, a group of mostly younger women formed the Helping Hands Sewing Circle and did their mission work in English. Their focus was closer to home, and their projects more local. They also did not do as much handwork and preferred to give money. Many of these were young mothers who had more exposure to the needs of the world around them.

Life was changing in Calgary. In 1955, Scarboro Mennonite Church became self supporting; until then it had been a Conference Mission outreach church. The *Mädchenheim* was closed because there was no longer a need for it. George Boldt was accepted as minister and Otto Bartel as *Ältester*, both were ordained in Germany. Sunday school was now taught both in English and German, the classes were large. Sadie Dyck was ordained as a Missionary to the Belgian Congo, (later called Zaire, now called the Democratic Republic of Congo). Four ministerial candidates were chosen – Peter Heidebrecht, Abe Sawatzky, Peter Braul and Rudy Janssen. A Sunday school was organized in Montgomery; it was there that many of our younger families had built their first home. This however was soon abandoned since most people preferred to attend Scarboro. A public address system was installed. A 20' x 35' addition was built to the church, but it was evident that we had to expand further.

In 1956 the Thanksgiving offering was designated as seed money to the building fund. Land was purchased and in September 1957 the sod was turned on 2600 Richmond Road. The Scarboro building was sold for \$26,000 and the estimated cost of the new structure was \$55,000. Under the able supervision of Rudy Janssen, the church was designed and constructed. Many of the members were building contractors so the cost of work and materials was minimized. Many stories could be told of experiences during the construction. The roof was steep – as it should be on a church. I am told that people had to hang on to each other to keep from sliding off. It was an answer to many prayers that no serious accident occurred. Although the construction was going quite quickly, there was still some time between selling the old and occupying the new. Services were held in Richmond Elementary School and in the Labor Temple. By

Christmas we were able to move into the basement of the new church.

That Christmas Eve service was not without incident. The Sunday school, as usual, presented the program. As part of the play, one young boy walked onto the stage dressed as Father Christmas with white cotton beard, carrying a twig of evergreen with a burning candle on it. Suddenly the flame got too close to the beard and "Whoom!!" A firefighter in the audience was on stage in a flash and extinguished the blaze before it could do any damage. Thankfully the boy was not seriously burned and carries no scar. We have been very cautious of the danger ever since, and reluctantly allow the use of candles. (Father Christmas was Hartwich Wiehler and the Fire-Fighter was John Klassen)

On March 16, 1958 the church was dedicated under its new name First Mennonite Church, Calgary,

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but with the same motto "Do not conform

any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what is God's will." (Romans 12: 2).

John (Hans) Kroeger from Paraguay was added to the list of ministerial candidates, and on July 13, 1958, *Ältester* J.J. Thiessen from Saskatoon came to ordain three couples, Peter and Annie Heidebrecht, Abe and Mary Sawatzky, and John and Susan Kroeger.

At a later congregational meeting Peter Heidebrecht was elected Minister in Charge. This

meeting was the first in a series of congregational meetings in which spiritual matters were brought to the entire congregation, while most matters were dealt with by the Brotherhood meetings. Looking back it could be noted that originally, in 1946, meetings were attended by all members and all had voting privileges. However in the early 1950s this was rescinded and only men conducted the affairs of the church. It was not until 1975, that Brotherhood meetings became Congregational meetings and women regained the vote.

The congregation was now over 250. With members coming from varied backgrounds, it was not surprising that differences and difficulties arose. Each group wanted to maintain its own traditions and methods of worship, of conducting business and perhaps of power. The most tangible of these was of course, the language.

With the arrival of the immigrants from Russia, Germany and later Paraguay, the trend toward English reversed. A real effort was made by some to retain the German language in worship. This was reinforced by those who felt that without German we as Mennonites could not survive. A *Verein der Deutschen Sprache* was formed and German Saturday school was organized. For many of us this was a refresher course as we realized it was good to know both languages.

On the other hand, many of our members had come from the surrounding communities of Rosemary, Didsbury and Coaldale and to them it presented a real stumbling block. Those families with young children had not



nurtured the German language at home, and had in fact deliberately discontinued its use. This was not hard to do during the war when anything German was treated with suspicion. These families were now left with what they felt were only the crumbs of the worship service. They wanted more for their children. They also wanted to reach out into the community with the Word of God.

Sunday school was taught in both languages; the parents could choose. The children learned English very quickly and teaching the German classes soon became bi-lingual – the teachers taught in German, the students responded in English. Teachers felt it was more important to teach the lesson than the language. Another problem was the ever-increasing crowding of the facilities. The balcony was remodeled to provide two classrooms. For a time Sunday school was taught in shifts, but this was not satisfactory.

There were always two sermons on Sunday, and the concession was made that the first sermon once a month would be in English. This did not solve the real problem.

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In 1963-64 a large number of members separated themselves to join the emerging North Hill Mission, which later became

the Foothills Mennonite Church. It was a severe blow yet through it all, and in spite of human frailties, the Lord has blessed both churches. Both churches have grown and prospered and later were able to work quite amicably together.

Among those who left was Nick Wedel, the deacon, and Abe Sawatzky one of the newly ordained ministers. John J. Sawatzky was torn between loyalties; the Lord provided an open door. The Clearbrook Mennonite

Church in British Columbia needed a minister and Sawatzky answered the call. A farewell service was held for the Sawatzkys in June 1964. For them it was the end of twenty years of pioneering and church building. It had not been an easy journey. The church he had worked so hard to build was splitting and he felt the pain for both sides.

After the rift we had to restructure. New deacons, Peter and Laura Dyck and Art and Erika Janz were ordained in 1965 to assist the David Goerzens who had moved here from Crossfield and had been accepted as deacons. At that time being a deacon was a lifetime commitment. The congregation decided that we should have our own *Ältester* and Peter Heidebrecht was ordained into that position in 1967. Until then, an *Ältester* had to be invited for services like Baptism and Communion.

1965 saw the beginning of a paid ministry for First Mennonite when Jacob Wiebe became a full time pastor. He had spent two summers here as youth worker and the congregation approved and hired him. Wiebe also took over the choir and led it enthusiastically for many years. He formed an active Early Teens Group to effectively bridge the years between Boys/Girls Club and Young People.

First Mennonite was fairly unique in that our first paid pastor served longer than those in any other Conference church. Whether this was a good thing or not could be debated. At the same time, several lay ministers served mostly in German: Peter Heidebrecht, Wilhelm Pauls, John Neufeld, Jacob Neufeld, Herman Walde, John Kroeger and Cornelius Warkentin. In 1969 the decision was made to have services in both English and German in a

50/50 arrangement. The first service on Sundays would be in German and the second in English.

Through all our struggles, God was gracious and First Mennonite continued

to grow. In fact the following 10-12 years were productive in many ways. Changes were made to the building. The foyer enlarged, front of the sanctuary changed, railing removed, communion table built and some benches upholstered. The Sunday school rooms were rearranged and some walls removed. The kitchen redone, typewriter bought, an organ and choir gowns purchased.

Ah – choir gowns. Our pianist, Elsie Becker was pregnant, so could not continue to play (yes, we were that modest). Pregnant women should not be seen in public places or positions. We were desperate to keep our pianist. By coincidence, there were gowns available from a church that was replacing theirs. After some debate in Church Council, the gowns were purchased, and Elsie continued to play. For several years we felt very elegant in those austere black gowns as we sang every Sunday. In the summertime the gowns were very hot soon the men stopped wearing them, just white shirts, dark pants, and usually a bow tie. Before long the women followed so their nice Sunday dresses would not be covered. For a while we wore the gowns just for special occasions, gradually they just hung in the

back, gathering dust. One year at Songfest, we were trying to convince other churches to get gowns too, but the guest conductor commented, “I really don’t like those black gowns. In God’s garden the flowers bloom in a profusion of colors.” Eventually they were only used as costumes in plays. Clapping was not allowed in the sanctuary and only reluctantly in the lower auditorium.

In 1970 the question arose whether women should be delegates to conferences. In our church women couldn’t even vote! The conference was changing and more and more women were attending, they were given equal rights. The vote by ballot was Yes – 31, No – 15. So we could attend as delegates and report back, but nothing changed within our own church.

Another issue was whether we should be concerned about the community around us. The Calgary Board of Education was asking churches to express their stand on the consumption of

alcohol at community functions held in school auditoriums. Our church responded that we were very much against it. We received a letter of acknowledgement with the comment that ours was the only church that had written expressing concern.

The church membership was outgrowing its facilities. Should we build an extension? Or plant another church? An extensive survey was done, together with the Foothills Church, which was also bursting at the seams. The Northwest Conference also was interested, so the three churches

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found a north east location and Calgary III was planted in 1975. It became Calgary Mennonite Fellowship and later Pineridge Mennonite Church.

Although Jacob Wiebe was the leading minister, several lay ministers graciously spoke on a regular basis. However these were older men and preached only in German. The question arose whether we should call a younger man out of our own congregation, or hire an associate pastor for the younger members? Until now, the benediction at the end of each Sunday service was spoken by the *Ältester*. The decision was now made to allow the leading minister, Jake Wiebe, to do so when the *Ältester* was absent.

When the MCC Thrift store was thrust upon us, our church accepted the challenge. The two representatives from our church were John Klassen and Anneliese Neudorf. It was referred to as the MCC Variety Store, all the suits were cleared out and we included other items. We had to register and license it. No one had time to think up another name, so for years it was the MCC Variety Store. Recently it was renamed MCC Thrift Shop better describing what it is. The records show that the first year's proceeds were \$8,288. It has grown remarkably since then.

1975 – the first MCC Relief sale was held in Coaldale and our church was fully involved. John and Katie Neufeld represented us on the MCC Sale Board for a number of years.

December 12, 1975 – Menno Gardens was opened and quickly filled, mostly with the elderly from our church. Some of the driving

forces in the planning and building were Rudy Janssen, Otto Bartel, Kurt Janz and Herb Klassen. I served as secretary of the Board for a term.

December 28, 1975 – a simple constitutional change converted Brotherhood meetings to Congregational meetings and women had the right to vote. The budget showed a surplus!!! This would be applied to the expenses of Calgary III.

1976 – The new Mennonite Hymnals were purchased. The Foundation Series of Sunday school material was introduced. Anne Heyde was sent to Newton Kansas for orientation concerning this material. The question arose, should non-members be allowed to teach Sunday school? It was ratified by Church Council that teachers should be members of some Mennonite Church, not necessarily ours. Another important issue was the

"The church membership was outgrowing its facilities. Should we build an extension? Or plant another church? ... Together with the Foothills Church [and] ...the Northwest Conference ... three churches found a north east location and Calgary III was planted in 1975. It became Calgary Mennonite Fellowship and later Pineridge Mennonite Church."

remarriage of divorced persons; the conclusion was that in certain cases, exceptions would be made. 1976 was also the year that First Mennonite Church, Calgary

was incorporated into the Societies Act. Previously it had been First Mennonite, but since Edmonton now also had a First Mennonite, we had to add Calgary.

1977 – Peter Heidebrecht retired as *Ältester*. In the development of Mennonite churches and the prevalence of hired pastors, the position of *Ältester* had become redundant. After much discussion it was decided that Jacob Wiebe, leading minister, would be allowed to perform those duties formerly performed only by the *Ältester*, e.g. baptism, communion. John Kroeger had done some preliminary work as Itinerant Minister for the Alberta Conference, began as City Missionary. He searched out all "Mennonite" names in the phone book; he visited and talked to a lot "lost" Mennonites. There were some new members due to his diligence. A project in Airdrie was started but discontinued after a short time.

In 1978, we realized that we really needed younger ministers and why not elect them from our own people. Some of our young men had attended Canadian Mennonite Bible College and Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), the church felt they could be preachers. Several ministerial candidates were elected and given a trial period. Only Peter Neudorf, felt the call and was later ordained. The search for a Youth Pastor continued.

In 1979, the house next door to the church was purchased. The first refugees from Laos were arriving, sponsored by a group of church members; this house was used for their meeting place. We were fortunate to have Lloyd Opel from Three Hills come to minister to these Laotians. Opel had been a missionary in Thailand and spoke the Lao language well. Some of these Lao refugees accepted Christ within a few months and asked to be baptized. This presented a problem, they insisted on baptism by immersion. Not to be daunted, a steel water trough was acquired, brought

into the sanctuary and filled with water. Several people gave their testimony and were baptized in the trough. Later there were weddings; Paul Landis officiated with the help of a translator. When Lloyd Opel returned to Thailand, some of our members took on the work. John Neufeld, Laura Dyck and others tried to fill in. Paul Landis has been involved ever since, even when the Lao Congregation found other more suitable places to worship.

By 1980, it was quite evident that we needed more deacons to serve the ever-growing membership, now well over 300. The old way of ordaining deacons for life, became too intimidating. So we decided to try for three-year terms. The first to be elected in this way were Paul Bartel, Ruth Quiring, Manfred Claassen and Don Chivers. The system has worked well, it has been continued.

In 1981, Menno Simons Christian School was started. A Friesen family from Manitoba donated the seed money and Mennonites in Calgary picked it up. Rudy Janssen was very much involved in the material aspects. Martin Goerzen became the first principal, planning curriculum and other aspects for a year before the school was opened for students. The City Missionary, John Kroeger was actively supported by the church. A secretary was hired to free Pastor Wiebe for more pastoral duties. Bruce Baergen was hired as Youth Pastor. Menno Court, a second senior residence, was opened. A dream of a third such building which would include some nursing care and food services, did not materialize since this was the beginning of the recession, which hit many of our members very hard.

Dreams of building and expanding the church surfaced.

Should we build a new building? Expand to the north wall? We also needed an elevator, to accommodate our elderly people. The idea of church planting was budding to alleviate crowding of the church, and also as an outreach into the community where many of our members now lived. On April 10, 1983 there was a "sending service" for those families, including Peter and Laura Dyck, deacons, who were planting Calgary IV, later known as Trinity. After the church was established several families returned, Jake and Irene Kroeger and Peter and Laura Dyck. Then the recession hit! Many of the lesser programs continued, but much of the dreaming into the future drifted into the doldrums.

During the next few years the Sunday school went through a number of changes. Classes were discontinued during the summer months, since attendance was sporadic. Intergenerational classes were offered. Then these too, were replaced by presenting a children's feature during the morning worship services, eventually even these were stopped as families spent time camping or traveling. Vacation Bible School (VBS) was scheduled for one week for several summers. Backyard VBS was tried with some success but it too was dropped. Several years later this project was revised and reborn for several summers but again it has been discontinued for lack of children. Junior Worship for children from 4-8 is one program that has been ongoing. The little ones always head downstairs with much excitement. The church Library was used mostly by the children, until more recently when

some of the Choice Books were brought into the foyer of the church. This has generated more interest.

With the increased number of deacons, they were able to divide the city into areas with each one responsible for the members in their area. They were able to make at least one visit annually to each family, as well as carrying out the deacon duties to the needy. The matter of serving wine at communion was a concern for some, whereas for some it was absolutely mandatory. A compromise was reached and both wine and grape-juice are available on the same tray.

A wheelchair ramp was built outside the church to accommodate those who had

On April 10, 1983 there was a "sending service" for those families, including Peter and Laura Dyck, deacons, who were planting Calgary IV, later known as Trinity.

difficulty with steps. Public address systems were installed in the common room of Menno

Gardens and Menno Court so that the residents could listen to the church service. An elevator was discussed but not yet affordable.

In 1983, the Constitution was revised quite drastically and the By-laws were separated. The Church Council was downsized from the unwieldy number that it had become. A quorum was established, but after several meetings it was deemed to be too high and has been modified. There have been celebrations. When Peter Heidebrecht and John Kroeger had served 25 years in the ministry it was cause for celebration. "Sing and Rejoice" song books were purchased in an effort to add more variety and contemporary music to the worship services.

In 1984, Vic and Adeline Rempel and their girls were commissioned to go to Kentucky as MCC volunteers. Adeline became quite ill there, but they felt that the service of rebuilding some homes had been worthwhile.

1985 – another celebration was held to honor Wilhelm Pauls and Jacob Neufeld for 50 years in the ministry. They had both been ordained in the Chinook/Sedalia congregation and had served in various churches since: Pauls at Didsbury and Menno Bible Institute and Neufeld in Gem.

In 1986, we found ourselves almost leaderless. Peter Neudorf went to Black Creek, BC to minister to that congregation. John Kroegers went to Germany to serve a church in Backnang for two years. Jake and Elsie Wiebe and their children went to Elkhart Indiana to attend the AMBS on a much needed sabbatical. A year later the Wiebes came back with new insights, enthusiasm and excitement. In the meantime the church was served by a variety of other ministers.

In 1987 the Calgary Mennonite Centre for Newcomers was opened with Ted Walter as director. Our representative was Walter Janzen.

Continued in next issue (Vol. X, No. 2).

A Remarkable Trek: Maria Penner's Story (1904-1998)

Written by Mary (Penner) Wall and summarized by Irene Klassen

A few years before her death on August 20, 1998 at the age of 94, Maria (Friesen) Penner shared her life story with her daughter Mary Wall. Maria's story is set in the age of global wars and sweeping political changes, is both unique and fascinating.

Maria Friesen was born to Abram and Katherina (Boschman) Friesen in 1904 in Silberfeld, Siberia, a cold unforgiving region near Novosibirsk. On March 24, 1924, Maria married David Penner. Little did the couple know the challenges that lay ahead, challenges that would test their faith and endurance. A son Hans was born on December 14, 1924. A second son born June 18 1926, died tragically at the age of four months.

In March 1927, Maria and David, a miller by trade, along with a large group of Mennonites, including David's parents Johan and Anna (Vogt) Penner left Silberfeld, traveling even farther East to the Amur region, just north of Manchuria China. On reaching the Amur, David received land once owned by wealthy Russians and later confiscated by the Communists. They built a house and planted crops, a son David, was born to them. Due to weather conditions, crops rotted in the ground. As a matter of fact, the future looked bleak. So they sold the land at a reasonable price and moved on.

The family group gathered in the city of Blagoveshchensk and prepared for their long journey by train back to Silberfeld, where for a while David was able to take on his former milling operation. However, since the Bolsheviks had taken over factories, farms and other means of production, the Penner family too was ordered to leave Silberfeld. On April 30, 1929, daughter, Mary was born.

A long trek in search of a better life began once more. The family group had grown. David and Maria and their three children were joined by his sister and brother-in-law Hans and Anna Penner, and David and Anna's parents, Johan, 68, and Anna 64. The entourage set out with horses and wagons loaded with all their worldly possessions. At Slavgorod they were delayed by bureaucracy in attaining travel documents, before finally boarding the train to Pavlova in Kazakhstan, and on to Alma Ata. In spite of having first class tickets, they were forced to crowd into box cars. At the stopovers, conditions were filthy and lice-infected.

At the river Amur Dachairsthat runs into the Aral Sea, they found a blessed escape route. On October 18, 1930, in the dead of the night, the men came upon a boat. The nine family members and what possessions they found room for, crowded on board. The men took turns paddling upstream while the others bailed water from the leaking boat. After paddling all night they reached the shores of Afghanistan, where they continued on foot over the hilly terrain and didn't look back until they were far from the Russian/Afghanistan border.

When they reached the Afghani border station, they were ordered to dress in Afghani fashion, and were again detained for several days. However it was not unpleasant, since they had a roof over their heads and were able to get some food. Another new mode of travel was provided for them – three camels complete with baskets on each side. Maria with baby Mary was

MHSA Bookstore

- Their Mark: Their Legacy (Klassen)
- Hard Passage (Arthur Kroeger)
- Molotschna Settlement (Goerz)

A complete list can be found on our website:
www.mennonitehistory.org

on one side, while David's father with the grandson balanced on the other. The second camel carried (grandmother Anna), Hans and Anna who was pregnant. Two Afghani soldiers accompanied the party, a third man was the self-proclaimed leader of the group.

At first the local home owners refused to give them hospitality. In Agsha there was a further delay of one day, when Anna gave birth to a daughter, Annie. The next stop was the large town of Mazar-el-Sharif where they received a warm welcome. The German Embassy in Kabul had been informed of the Penner's arrival and had sent some German money. This caused the soldiers to show them more respect. However two Russian men suddenly appeared and confronted them. Fear gripped them as they thought of their crimes – leaving Russia illegally and “stealing” a boat. The Afghani assured them, and nothing happened.

Next step of the journey was on horseback, but the grandmother Anna had to be tied onto the horse for fear of sliding off in the hilly climb. Day after day they travelled over the rough terrain and even crossing a raging river. Finally they reached the outskirts of Kabul, where they were heartily welcomed by the German Embassy. At last the travelers were able to bathe and free themselves of the lice. All the men were given haircuts.

Afghanistan, almost as large as Texas, has had a long stormy history. At this time, King Mohamed Zahi Shah served as hereditary head of state. He appointed the Prime Minister who in turn served as head of Government. David and Hans found work in a factory and the family was housed in the German Consulate. By spring Hans was given a job as chauffeur for a German official and David was given the job of handyman. He struck up a friendship with the king.

Eventually each family was able to establish their own home and life became quite normal. Maria was kept busy baking and cooking for the consulate. She cooked and preserved the abundant fruit in the area, David turned the fruit into wine, a popular commodity among the westerners living in Kabul. Since he was a friend of the king, his Majesty, whose Muslim beliefs banned alcohol, turned a blind eye to David's bootlegging. In 1935 the family even took out German Citizenship. Maria and David had two more children, Abraham and Annie. The boys attended Afghani schools and became fluent in the language, whereas the girls were sent to German school. Hans and Anna also had a second, child a girl, Margaret. Anna, the grandmother became quite ill and died.

In October 1941 the British expelled all Germans and Italians from India and Afghanistan. And once again the Penner family had to move. They traveled through the Kyber Pass to Peshwar India, where they spent ten days in a large prison while the British officials checked them. They stripped them of all their valuables. The family had sent their hard-earned money to Berlin for safe-keeping. They were given the option of traveling to Australia. However, recalling that the Germans helped them in Afghanistan, and their savings were presumably awaiting in Berlin, they decided to head for Germany (sadly their savings were never recovered),

They boarded the train for Karachi, took a boat across the Arabian Sea, through the Persian Gulf, to Baghdad the Suez Canal the Dardanelles to Istanbul. And then by train again to Romania, by bus to Bulgaria, Yu-

goslavia and Hungary and finally to Vienna, Austria. There the family became separated and went in different directions. Maria and David went to Stuttgart, and were there just a few days before the first bombs were dropped. They settled temporarily in Blumberg Bavaria. The children attended school. Abraham's Jewish name was changed to Adolf. David and Hans were conscripted and even the senior David was ordered to serve as guard for a German ship stationed in Holland.

At the end of the war, Russia announced that all former residents should return. The Penner family made up their minds to flee again; Paraguay was the only option. However the trip had to be delayed because of Maria's illness and in the meantime a cousin Henry Boschman from Coaldale applied to sponsor them. Unfortunately David Senior was unable to travel and stayed behind. He died a few short months after that.

Maria and David and their family arrived in Coaldale after a short stop-over in St. Catharines where they were briefly united with Hans and Anna. In Coaldale it was first in the sugar beets and then David got work at the Lethbridge Research Centre. In 1972 David and Maria moved for a short while to Osoyoos, BC to be with Abe (who had resumed his original name) but a few years later returned to Coaldale, where they lived in the Sunny South Lodge. David suffered emotionally from his life of constant danger and unrest, and passed away in 1986 at the age of 92. Maria lived on to be 94, and passed away on August 20 1998. ❖

Hard Passage by Arthur Kroeger.

Review by Lorne Buhr.

This book begins with a box. A wooden box. Without it and his own curiosity and persistence Arthur Kroeger would never have been able to write the story of his family's "hard passage" from Russia (now Ukraine) to Canada. The box contained various documents, photographs and diaries his father had saved over the years.



Many of these kinds of stories are known to us, but not often with a perspective beyond tragedy and hard times. Mennonites coming to Canada by the thousands after the Russian Revolution and the advent of Communism mostly had sorry tales because of the rampant violence in a country out of control. Anarchy. Poverty, violence, disease, warfare, rampant inflation all combined to make the Russian "heaven" of the 1800's a near "hell" for those Mennonites still there in the 1920's when the Kroegers left.

Going beyond the facts, which often read like a catalogue of whatever could go wrong; Arthur Kroeger gives us a 3-D portrayal of his parents, Heinrich and Helena. The Father suffered greatly because of overwork, illness and the resulting despair. The Mother, perhaps less literate and vocal, often was the heart and soul who kept the family together and away from the brink of only surviving. But she also carried a terrible burden to Canada. Terror knew no limits for our Mennonite refugees.

In Rosenthal, where Heinrich and his in-laws started a wagon factory, World War I came along and took Heinrich into the medical corps, in accordance with the agreement Mennonites had made with the "state". The first and second Kroeger sons, Nick and Henry, were born in Moscow. Somehow Helena managed to travel there to visit her ailing husband while he was on sick leave during his alternate service. This is an example of how much pluck and devotion she had.

One could have hoped that after overcoming the steeplechase of constant barriers in Europe and getting into Canada, matters would have settled out some, with some semblance of normalcy.

Economic and weather factors, not only adjusting to a new and dominant culture, were about to hound the Mennonite farmer immigrants. Those who were settled in the Palliser Triangle of southeastern Alberta bore the brunt of the dry years, the worst being 1934-37. The Kroegers moved many times in a decade of trying to farm without owning any land. Heinrich turned to carpentry often to maintain a meagre income. He sent constant pleas to Mennonite officials for aid, as no help was forthcoming from the government. This was in keeping with the agreement to let Mennonites into Canada in the first place. In fact, indigent immigrants were often deported. Given the abject poverty and near famine in many parts of the Canadian prairies in those years it is a tribute to the CPR and especially two of its top officials for not trying to wring payment out of the Mennonites.

Kroeger pays tribute both to the CPR and to several Mennonite

leaders for never giving up on this great humanitarian endeavour. The final *Reiseschuld* payment was made in 1946. Because of strong anti-German feelings in Canada during these times there were numerous vocal detractors of the Mennonite immigrants who had been let into the country by the Mackenzie King Liberals and the CPR. Wars against Germany didn't make it easy to be gracious with the German speaking Mennonites. However, the author also wants us to know that there were numerous individuals, many named, who helped the immigrants in the Naco and Consort area and who became steady and reliable friends of the Kroegers. This is a balanced account. Thus, Canada's welcome was seen as genuine although tainted in portions. Eventually the idea of returning to Russia faded into unreality.

And the Kroegers never forgot how to be generous, even when it hurt. This reviewer is most impressed by an incident toward the end of the book. Nick and Henry Kroeger, Arthur's older brothers, are now in the farm machinery business whose earnings are shared as needed by the parents and siblings. Arthur has completed high school and is toying with the idea of university. How will it be financed? The school year has already begun. An early snowfall has sent the fall harvest into a tizzy and



money is again short but the brothers decide they will fund Arthur's studies. The outcome of this generosity and looking at the long term is that Arthur flourishes as an academic and becomes a Rhodes Scholar. He enters the federal foreign service as the first step of being a career public servant, 17 years as Deputy Minister in six different departments. He becomes known as the "Dean" of Deputy Ministers. Older brother Henry becomes an Alberta MLA and a member of Peter Lougheed's government.

These outcomes are amazing as the author has given us an earlier balanced account of the government's mentality about poverty during the depression. Nothing in the book smacks of empty triumphalism. Success is not a goal to be won by this family of survivors. Nowhere do we get the idea that religious belief either created or solved a myriad of problems they faced. But we do learn of how Arthur re-discovered his Mennonite roots and we sense a deep appreciation for what that means to him. And, of course, that background starts with the religious motivation of the Anabaptist forebears. This is a book which deserves at least two readings.

MHSA News

Practicum Placement

Adam Beriault joins MHSA for Practicum as he completes his History Degree at Canadian Mennonite University. He'll be spending three days a week for 12 weeks at the MHSA, assisting in the processing of archival records and providing assistance to our visiting researchers. Following are some of his thoughts regarding the opportunities to learn while he's with us.

"I hope to use this practicum

experience as a sort of test to see if history is a field that I wish to pursue as a career.

"It will be fascinating to see how the conditions of the Alberta Mennonites (comparatively more poverty, smaller population, wider dispersion and assimilation, etc.) affected their understanding of church, faithfulness and identity, as well as how they interacted with the various other cultural and ethnic influences that surrounded them. I am also looking forward to the opportunity to hopefully learn more about the history of my family.

"The Mennonite world, as I have learned, is one full of conflict, insularity and sometimes hypocrisy but I also believe that it can also be characterized as one which strives to be faithful.

"Obviously there are many other influences which have affected and continue to affect Mennonite history, but I believe that a continued cycle of decline and conflict followed by renewal and struggle to be faithful can be observed in Mennonite history. This is one aspect of what I believe it means to be the Church—a constant tension to remain faithful and a constant renegotiation of what it is to be faithful in order to represent Christ's story to the world. I hope to use my time at the MHSA to continue to consider this, and to confirm, or even re-evaluate my beliefs."

MHSA Need You! Holiday, Post, and Wish Cards

The MHSA has developed a number of "sharing" environments on our website where MHSA members and other visitors can

contribute and benefit.

We have dedicated web pages for Mennonite photographs that need identification, surname histories, biographical sketches and letters of conscience and immigration. All are accessible through links from our Projects page: www.mennonitehistory.org/projects.

One of the things we're hoping to do in the next six months is mount a set of pages dedicated to postcard/greeting card communication. So many of the Mennonite cards were given on holidays such as Easter, Christmas, and New Year's Day. They frequently featured German imagery even though they may have been sent from Russia: angels, haloed red candles and evergreen boughs.

Please share your collections with us. They deserve to be well-preserved (acid-free containers, temperature and humidity controlled environment) and shared.

If you donate them to the MHSA, we will scan your collection in high-resolution colour files and provide you with a CD or DVD that can be copied for as many members of your family as you like. And, the cards will be around for so many more to see them. If you feel you need to keep them, let us borrow them to make the digital copies (or ask us about the technical specifications to make your own digital copies).

Donations for Mobile Shelving

Donations are needed before year end so that we can purchase another bank of mobile shelving. With practicum student Adam Beriault with us, we hope to process a lot of records into the vault

and they need a place to rest.

The concrete floor is not the right place!

The shelving will cost about \$2,500. Perhaps one generous donor will help? Or, several family members will contribute? We'd be happy to give the bank of shelves a name plate in honour of the donor if that would be welcome.

Vertreterversammlung

Do you remember this assembly of representatives/delegates that met annually or more before MCC (Alberta) was founded? We have a good selection of the reports/minutes from 1946 to 1964,

but have very few from the of the reports from the early years.

We would really like to have a complete set of these important historical reports. Let us know if you can help us find copies of the documents from the 1930s and 1940s.

As well, so that the important decisions can be understood by all, we'd like assistance in translating them into English. Only one has been done so far (thanks, Erna Goerzen!). Any volunteers for this work?

Please contact Judii at queries@mennonites.ca or 403-969-5115 to discuss the possibilities.

Watch for Gulag Letters

Ruth Derksen's future website (www.gulagletters.com) will release letters found by Peter Bargaen (tr. by Anne Bargaen) like a serial story—one a week. Associated with this project is a filmed documentary, and Ruth's own PhD dissertation.

The letters were written by Mennonites from Stalin's prison camps in the Gulag and from southern home villages during the "Reign of Terror" (1930 forward).

The letters were originally published by Peter & Anne Bargaen for their own family.

More details soon.

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