

# Mennonite Historian

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



Markings on Mennonite clocks: "Lepp" (top rt): 1836 clock by Peter Lepp of Chortitza; "Jacob Mandtler 1848" (top lf); "GH" (bottom rt): 1853 clock by Gerhard Harm; "K.HDB": 1874 clock by Kornlius Hildebrand.

## The Mennonite Clockmakers of Prussia and Russia

By James O. Harms

This is about a well-known artifact from our history -- the Mennonite Clock. It is also about the search for information on those who made it. These clocks were made by Mennonite craftsmen who settled the area near Danzig, Prussia, and later in the Mennonite settlements in South Russia. They didn't invent this clock, but took elements from clocks of the time, and incorporated these elements into a design they adopted as their own. They produced clocks based

on this design for 200 years, beginning in the very early part of the 18th century.

All of these clocks have painted metal faces (early faces were sometime decorated with Old Testament scenes - later designs often used flowers); long brass pendulums (one meter, more or less); recoil escapements; brass weights filled with lead, with ornate, turned end caps; cast brass hands. Many have rope drives, others have chain drives. There is a stout metal box protecting the works, but

no other casework. They hang on the wall.

One of the few people still living who knew one of the clockmakers personally is Arthur Kroeger of Winnipeg. He has worked to make sure the Kroeger legacy as clockmakers and manufacturers is not forgotten. But there were other important clockmakers who are not as well known, and others we do not know at all. Some of their clocks survive, but we often have no documentation other than the clocks themselves, and the manufacturing quirks and design details that tie them to their makers. It is these clocks I have been researching for years. We have to let the clocks tell us their story. In a sense, this is more like archeology than historical research. The records are gone -- because of time, and two world wars that ravaged the area where our forebears once lived.

We don't know all the clockmakers in Russia, and know even less about those in Prussia. Research into the Prussian clockmakers is hampered by the lack of records, and the fact that none of the clockmakers were allowed to mark the clocks they made. This was the result of the special legal arrangements the Mennonites had -- which gave them special privileges, but also precluded some things, like being able to join the guilds that would have given them the legal right to mark their work.

### Mennonite Clockmakers in Prussia

The **Kroeger** family is the best known, and most well-documented of the clockmakers we presently know. In Prussia they were the Krueger family, and were later known as Kroeger after Johann moved to the Chortitza settlement of South Russia in 1804.

In 2006 I was asked to restore a clock for the Mennonite Settlement Museum in Hillsboro, Kansas. As I disassembled the clock I saw the name of its maker engraved on the main gear -- Jacob Mandtler 1848. Historians had only heard of Gerhard Mandtler, and it was assumed he was the only clockmaker in the family. Who was Jacob Mandtler? While looking for answers to this question I started the "Mandtler Project". This has involved several researchers, and has uncovered information that was completely unknown a couple of years ago. We now know the **Mandtler** family made clocks in Prussia for several generations before Jacob and his family moved to the Molotschna settlement in 1839. Two of his sons also became clockmakers, as did one of his grandsons.

For years I heard stories of a Prussian

(cont'd on p. 2)

## Mennonite Clockmakers

(cont'd from p. 1)

Mennonite clockmaker named **Janzen**. None of his clocks are known, and information about him is virtually nonexistent. But we can document the fact that Peter Lepp left Chortitza about 1833 to go to Prussia and become his apprentice. From this I assume that Janzen was a respected clockmaker, since there is no reason to make such a journey to study with one who was not.

I know of two clocks that have a definite "family resemblance" based on similarities in the design of the works, and the ornamentation on the works. It is likely they were made in the same shop. But the maker of these clocks is **unknown**. The movement is unlike the more-common "strap" type of the early clocks, and is sometime called a "Four-post" or "Three-plate" movement. These are more complex to build and were no doubt more expensive, which may explain why there are so few of them extant. No clocks with works of this type were known to be made in Russia, so it is likely that all clocks of this type came from Prussia. One of these two clocks was made in 1804, the other about 40 years later. Given this span of time, this clockmaker was apparently in business for at least two generations. And we don't know who they are.

This is not a complete list of Prussian makers of the Mennonite Clock, but these are the ones we know about at this time. More research is needed.

### Mennonite Clockmakers in Russia

We know more about the clockmakers in Russia. It is several generations closer to our time, and more details of our history have survived. In 1804 Johann **Kroeger** settled in Chortitza, the "Old Colony", and continued the family business there. In 1836 Peter **Lepp** returned from his apprenticeship with Janzen and set up shop in Chortitza. In 1839 Jacob **Mandler** moved to Molotschna and continued the family business. Other known clockmakers include Gerhard **Hamm** and Kornelius **Hildebrand**, who both made clocks in Chortitza.

In the Mennonite settlements in Russia, there were at least three who used the clock business as a springboard to heavy industry. David Kroeger left the clockworks to his brother Johann (same name, later generation), and worked to develop the Kroeger Engine Factory, which had its own foundry and 60 employees. Peter Lepp was a founding partner in Lepp and Wallman, which by 1887 employed 250 men, and built threshing machines, plows, and steam engines up to 25 horsepower. Kornelius Hildebrand was a founding partner in Hildebrand and Priess, which manufactured agricultural machinery, and later expanded into other areas.

Unlike Prussia, in Russia clocks could be marked by their maker. But not everyone chose to do this. Kroeger continued the Prussian practice and did not mark their clocks. There are unmarked clocks from Russia that do not share characteristics of clocks by known clockmakers, so it seems there were others who also decided not to mark their clocks. Without having shared characteristics, and without marks to identify the maker, there is a long list of clocks that cannot presently be identified. Some have said that all unmarked clocks were made by Kroeger. But remember -- none of the Mennonite clockmakers in Prussia were allowed to mark their clocks, and not all of those in Russia decided to mark theirs.

In my study of clocks that are unmarked, I have worked to identify manufacturing and design characteristics of the works, and to group clocks with similar characteristics together. Sometime these characteristics fit the clocks of a

known clockmaker. Sometime they do not. I don't think you can identify a clock using only the hands, face, pendulum, or weights, but I do use these to support information gleaned from studying the works. Faces were changed when early clocks were "modernized", hands were changed to match the dimensions of the new faces. Pendulums were awkward when moving, and weights were heavy. Both of these could be replaced if needed. The works and the metal box that protects it is the only constant.

I know of two **Friesen** clocks. One of these is a simple clock, and is identified by the family as one made by Gerhard Friesen in the Molotschna settlement. The other clock has a more complex calendar movement, and is marked on the main gear with a stamp "G.Friesen", and dated "1853". Are these the same person? We don't know yet.

I have heard of a clockmaker named **Koop**, and also one named **Regier**. We don't know anything about them. And it is likely there are others we do not know.

This has been a brief summary of research to date. If anyone has information to add, or the answer to any of the riddles presented here, I would like to hear from you.

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**Mennonite Historian** is published by the Mennonite Heritage Centre of Mennonite Church Canada and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.

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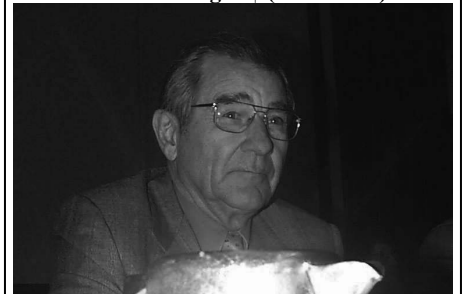
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Subscription rates: \$12.00 per year, \$22.00 for two years, \$30.00 for three years. Individual subscriptions may be ordered from these addresses.

ISSN 07008066

### Arthur Kroeger † (1932-2008)



Arthur Kroeger, "Dean of Deputy Ministers" having held the post of deputy minister for six federal government departments from 1975 until 1992, died in Ottawa on May 9, 2008. He was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1989 and was promoted to Companion in 2000. Kroeger documented his family's history in his memoir *Hard Passage: A Mennonite Family's Long Journey from Russia to Canada* (University of Alberta Press, 2007), a book which recently received the Alberta Book Publishers Award in Trade and Non-Fiction, but he did not live to hear about it. Our Mennonite archives and historical societies remember him as a gentle and gracious supporter of the preservation of our Mennonite heritage.

# Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp

## Queries

**Dueck / Peters** – Looking for the ancestors of Justina Dueck (b. 13 May 1805 in Chortitz, Russia), wife of Johann Peters and mother of Heinrich Peters (1839-1923) who immigrated in 1875 and died in Lost River, Saskatchewan.

**Petkau / Peters** – Looking for the ancestors of Susanna Petkau (b. 27 July 1846 in Chortitz; married Heinrich Peters (1839-1923) in 1870; died 1918 of influenza). Contact: Donna Paul, 375 Arnold Rd. Abbotsford, BC V3G1S4. P:604-854-1424. E-mail: donnapaul@shaw.ca.

## Recent Books

Sally Harms. *Legends and Legacy: Klaas Heide 'Delegate' 1740-2007* (Winkler, MB: Harms Publishing, 2007) 353 pp.

This book traces the genealogy of Klaas Heide (1859-1926) back six generations to Peter Heyde (1740) and the descendants and family history up to the present (2007). Klaas Heide emigrated from Russia to Manitoba as a 16 year-old

in 1875 and is remembered most for his leading role as a delegate from 1919-1921 in search of a country for the Old Colony Mennonites, where they could preserve their sacred traditions. He left Manitoba in 1922 at the age of 62, helping to lead a large Mennonite community to Mexico.

Contact: Sally Harms, Box 681, Winkler, MB R6W 4A8.

Sally Harms. *Abram P. & Helena Friesen History + Family 1740-2001* (Winkler, MB: Harms Publishing, 2002) 300 pp.

This book begins by tracing the genealogy of Abram P. Friesen (1878-1945) back four generations to Jacob Friesen (ca. 1740). He was married to Helena Heide (1879) in 1899. The book continues with the genealogy, biographical sketches and photos of most of the descendants of this marriage right up to the present (2001). A name index at the end is a very useful resource. Contact: S. Harms, Box 681, Winkler, MB R6W 4A8.

Kenneth Peter Petkau. *Lost Dreams, New Beginnings: The Jacob Aron and David Aron Lepp Family Saga from the Mid 1700s until 1955* (Waldheim, SK: [The author], 2008) 290 pp.

This book provides a detailed family history of Jacob Aron Lepp (1873-1952) and his older brother David Aron Lepp (1866-1948), and a less detailed family history of their siblings and the Lepp ancestors. This history includes chapters on the origin of the name, leaving West Prussia, building a new home in Imperial Russia, family life in Orenburg and Schoenhorst, experiences during the Russian Revolution (1917) and subsequent civil war and anarchy, survival, leaving Russia and new beginnings in Canada. The publication includes numerous photographs, sketches, maps, reproductions of family documents and an up-to-date genealogy of the descendants of Aron Peter Lepp (1827-1911). Contact: Ken Petkau, Box 23, Waldheim, SK S0K 4R0. E-mail: kenpetkau@gmail.com.

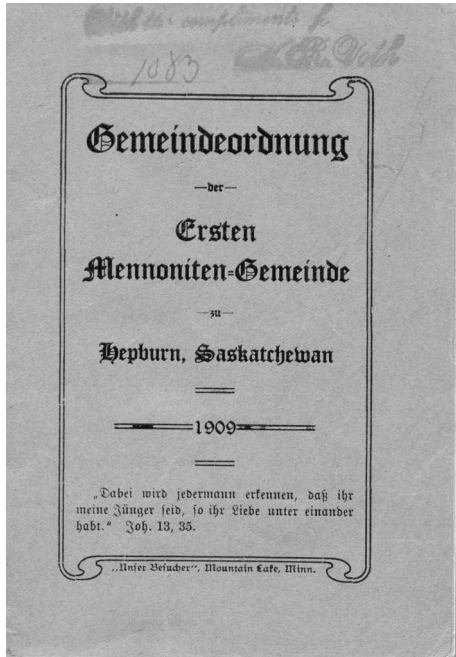
Peter Paetkau. *Johann Jacob Paetkau, 1799-1882*. (Winnipeg, MB: Unpublished manuscript, 2008) 40 pp.

This item contains additional information to what the compiler finds in the Paetkau books by Esther Patkau of Saskatoon. The compiler begins by documenting the "Claassen Connection" by which he means that there were three sons of Julius Claassen (1798) that married daughters of his Great Grandfather Johann Jacob Paekau (1799-1882). In addition to biographical notes on these families, he includes a variety of stories of his father's early life in Burwalde and Zentral in Southern Russia, and his mother's early life in Gruenfeld in the Baratov-Schlachtin settlement. The manuscript ends with some sketches from the compiler's own life and an appendix and photo gallery. Contact Peter Paetkau,, 2-738 St. Mary's Road, Winnipeg, MB R2M 3N4.



Can you help identify this photograph? What is the place? Who are the people? When and why was it taken? This photo was brought to Canada by Peter A. Unger of Gregorewka, Russia in 1925. A copy was recently donated to the Mennonite Heritage Centre by Laura Murphy of Winnipeg. Please contact the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

Send inquiries to Alf Redekopp, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4 or e-mail: aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca



## First Mennonite Church of Hepburn, Saskatchewan?

A small 10-page item entitled *Gemeindeordnung der Ersten Mennoniten-Gemeinde zu Hepburn, Saskatchewan, 1909* was recently acquired by the Mennonite Heritage Centre. Also on the cover is the scripture verse in German which in English reads “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13.35). The small print at the bottom of the cover gives another clue about the printer / publisher of the item – “Unser Besucher”, Mountain Lake, Minn.”

What is so unusual about this item is that there seems to be little to no other evidence of the existence of this local congregation. Perhaps some reader can provide information to the contrary.

The booklet contains 15 sections for a typical church constitution: 1) Name of the congregation, 2) Purpose and objectives of the organization, 3) Statement of Faith, 4) Calling of the minister, 5) Church leadership, 6) Duties of the Church leadership,

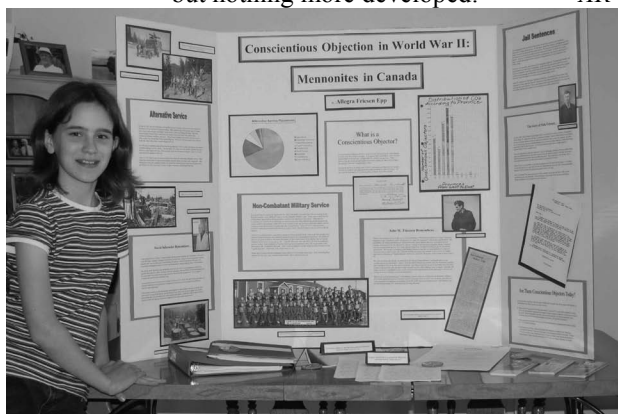
Church 7) Trustees, 8) Duties of the Trustees, 9) Duties of the Treasurer, 10) Duties of the Secretary, 11) Congregational meetings, 12) Congregation decision making, 13) Marriage, 14) Reception of members, 15) Changes and amendments.

In the second paragraph of Article 2, it says that “the purpose of the organization is not, to found a separate church, but rather a local affiliate to the Rosenorter Gemeinde...” It goes on to say, if they should ever be without a minister, they would request assistance from the Rosenorter Church, and they would also request the Rosenorter bishop to administer baptisms and communion observances for them.

The MHC archives found this item among boxes of congregations records on First Mennonite Church (Saskatoon) that were recently transferred from the Mennonite Library and Archives (Newton, KS). On the inside cover, there is a “cataloguing sticker which shows that the item was collected by H.R. Voth of Goltry, dated 28. 2. 1920. The cover is stamped “With compliments of H.R. Voth” followed by the number 1083, which presumably is an accession or cataloguing number.

Henry R. Voth (1855-1931), was a Mennonite minister, missionary, anthropologist and home mission worker. He served congregations in Goltry and Gotebo, Oklahoma from 1914-1927, and retired to Newton, Kansas where he died in 1931. He was president of the Mennonite Historical Association from 1914-1930 with an interest in collecting historical items.

What happened to this group? Who were they? Where did they meet? When did they discontinue? Where are there additional references to such a local congregation? Did this congregation actually exist, or was there simply a vision to organize – having a constitution, but nothing more developed. *AR*



Allegra Friesen Epp with her heritage fair display. Photo credit: Judith Friesen-Epp.

## Successful Website

The Mennonite Heritage Centre's thematic web site [www.alternative-service.ca](http://www.alternative-service.ca) continues to generate opportunities to talk about alternatives to war. For 4 years running now the Centre has received invitations to teachers' conferences and heritage fairs for Grades 6-11 in Winnipeg. The web site is promoted as a resource, highlighting a little known, but significant part of Canadian history, and inviting educators to include this topic in their curriculum. The site documents the experience of the Canadian conscientious objectors (CO) in the Second World War.

It is exciting to see 300 children at a heritage fair participate in a scavenger hunt, finding out key aspects of each display, and at the end of the day having a better idea about what a conscientious objector is. The CO display is usually the only one of its kind among a plethora of war-related displays.

There have also been invitations to speak to churches, youth groups and schools, both public and private, about the CO story. The presentations are usually an hour long giving an overview of the CO experience using the web site. Sometimes people with CO experience tell their personal story in addition to the overview. Through these presentations children continue to learn about alternatives to violence. Questions are a mix of historic and current life application questions.

The Centre has also received an increase of research requests related to this theme. Recently Allegra Friesen Epp, a Grade 6 student in Winnipeg contacted the Centre asking for assistance in creating a display featuring conscientious objectors. She conducted interviews, did research at the Centre and used the web site to create a display featuring men who worked in a hospital, a medic in the military, and a man who spent time in prison for his beliefs. Allegra impressed the judges with her display and understanding of the topic, and was chosen as one of 15 students to represent Manitoba at the National Heritage Fair in Victoria, BC.

Visits to the web site remain steady at 1000-1400 visitors a month (filtering out search engine visits). There is always a significant drop during July and August, suggesting that when school is not in session, teachers and students are not visiting the site.

## Cities Volume II Launched



With 75 people squeezed into the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies on Wednesday evening May 28, Volume II of *Mennonites in the Cities of Imperial Russia* was officially launched. The full house came to celebrate with the author Dr. Helmut Huebert. Many in attendance had familial connections with the nine cities on which this book focused.

Dr. Huebert noted at the outset that our impression has been that Mennonites were predominantly farmers within Imperial Russia. His research shows that while farming was the major economic activity, a steady stream of Mennonites had moved into the cities where they became involved within a diverse economy—often in manufacturing. While Mennonites comprised only a small portion of the population, at one time they produced approximately 10% of the agricultural equipment in Russia.

Perhaps most fascinating is the methodology that Dr. Huebert, an Orthopedic Surgeon, used in researching this book. A good portion of his research came from following up on obscure references and clues to events, businesses and activities. These were painstakingly followed up by reading thousands of articles and reports within a broad spectrum of periodicals. Gleaned bits of information were pieced together to document the extensive nature of Mennonite involvement within these selected cities.

All in attendance were fascinated with the stories. All were amazed at the broad content of this volume. This book makes a significant contribution to the study of Mennonites in Imperial Russia and is the newest “must have” book for people interested in Russian Mennonite history.

The book is available from Kindred Productions, 1310 Taylor Ave., Winnipeg Manitoba for \$ 45.00.

KR

## New Director at CMBS



Beginning this month the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies will have a new director. **Doug Heidebrecht** from Hepburn, Saskatchewan takes over the position from retiring director Ken Reddig.

Doug will be familiar to many since he was a long-time professor of Bible and Theology at Bethany College in Hepburn, Saskatchewan. He also was a frequent speaker in churches throughout the region. Doug has been employed at Bethany since 1992 and for several years served as the Academic Dean.

Doug is a graduate of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California and currently is completing doctoral work at the University of Wales. His dissertation topic is on women in ministry among the Mennonite Brethren.

Doug and his family will be moving to Winnipeg in June. His wife Sherry is a marriage and family therapist and has worked in various positions at Bethany as well. They have two adult children.

We welcome Doug to this position. His background and experience both in history as well as working with congregations will be a nice fit.

Ken Reddig

## Renewed Website

The Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches has launched a new web site using the familiar domain address [www.mbconf.ca](http://www.mbconf.ca) The Centre for MB Studies can now be found at [www.mbconf.ca/home/ministries/history](http://www.mbconf.ca/home/ministries/history).

The new site is content management-driven allowing staff to easily post and update information. Most finding aids have already been moved over to the new site and we will continue adding materials to the new site as they become available. Also, the *Mennonite Historian* in the future will be available on a new enhanced site together with the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

CDS



## Old Director

I have served a total of almost 15 years as Director of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. My first stint was from 1979 to 1990 and then again from 2005 until the end of June 2008.

I recall my first years at the Centre. I was a part-time director and spent the other part assisting Herb Giesbrecht in the library of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College, where the Centre was then located. Herb and I had an interesting initial encounter.

We first met when he, as the first conference archivist, came to the Mennonite archives at Goshen College where I was working as a seminary student. Herb wished to learn about archives. I had been employed at the archives since I could read German. It was summer and the rest of the staff were on holidays so it was up to me to show Herb how we did things in Goshen. Little did I know that in a few short years I would be working with Herb at the Centre in Winnipeg.

There were many highlights for me over the years. Many students worked in the Centre in summer student positions. Many theses, dissertations, books and articles were researched and published. It was a delight to work with a variety of people from Mennonites to television journalists.

I wish to thank the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches and its leadership for having the confidence in me and my abilities over these many years. From among the many people to thank I will single out one, Dr. Helmut Huebert. Dr. Huebert was the long-time chair and board member of many different committees—some of which had direct oversight of the Centre. Aside from his official duties he was a fastidious researcher and supporter of the Centre. The success of the Centre can truly be attributed to his keen interest in seeing the documentary heritage of the Mennonite Brethren Church preserved in the best possible fashion. Thank you Dr. Huebert for being a good friend and the ultimate supporter of this important work. I am deeply grateful.

Ken Reddig

## Book Notes

by Adolf Ens

Ratzlaff, Gerhard, *One Body – Many Parts: The Mennonite Churches in Paraguay*. Translated by Jake K. Balzer (Asunción: by the author, 2008), 307 pages. Ratzlaff, well-known historian and church leader, prepared this comprehensive account of the entire range of Mennonite communities in Paraguay at the initiative of an inter-Mennonite commission at the turn of the century. Although the author is part of what he calls the “progressive-minded Mennonites,” this book attempts to understand, more than to judge, the “traditional” and the “conservative American” Mennonite groups. Data presented are clear and well-summarized, generally taken as of 2000. This is not a church history, though a good portion of the book describes the many arms of the churches’ work, but pays due attention to social, educational, economic and some political dimensions as well. As the number of indigenous Mennonites (Indian and Latin Paraguayan) will soon exceed that of the immigrant churches, a good portion of the book also deals with the various mission and social service programs. Available in paperback, \$15 at Mennonite Heritage Centre and some congregations with substantial ex-Paraguayan membership.

An item of related interest is old but turned up recently. *Die Landwirtschaft im paraguayischen Chaco* by Prof. Dr. Kempfski was published in Buenos Aires in 1931. The book’s focus is on crops, but the section on the recently-founded Menno and Fernheim settlements (pages 15-34) provides an entry, often with photos, for each of the 27 villages founded by 1931. It provides copious detail on field and garden crops frequently almost absent in Mennonite accounts of these settlements.

A new hymnal for the Paraguayan Mennonite churches, *gm: Gesangbuch der Mennoniten* (Wiesbaden: Haus der Musik, 2007) may have set a new record with its 1006 pages. Commissioned and co-published by the Vereinigung der Mennonitengemeinden Paraguays, its 576 songs span the history of the church and incorporate many new compositions, ensuring that it should serve the churches well for another generation. A modest section of worship aids and an excellent set of indexes will be most helpful to preachers and worship leaders.

*The Harpist Eduard Klassen: The Untold Story* (Stratford, ON: Eduard & Christine Klassen – CIM Inc., 2006) is written in the voice of Eduard by Lois Neely. The longer sub-title of the book, “The story of how God took Eduard Klassen and his harp from the Paraguayan jungle to the stages of the world,” is an apt summary of this hard-cover (80 pages, \$28), glossy paper biography with numerous colour photo illustrations. Klassen and his Paraguayan harp have given over 3000 concerts in 20 countries in North America and 12 tours in Europe. His CD recordings focus on Christian hymns but include Latin rhythm, Country and Bluegrass, and children’s songs.

## Book Reviews

(cont’d from p. 8)

referring to their faith.

In the appendices (but also throughout the text) the book includes many comparative figures, statistical graphs, tables, an extensive bibliography, and a useful index, all most helpful tools for the interested reader and scholar.

The book is a valuable comparative study of a group of people who made Winnipeg and Bielefeld their homes after suffering deprivation, oppression and persecution in their home countries. The stories are well told and to the point, making for interesting and informative reading. The book should find a welcome and prominent place on the shelves of other immigrant histories and in school and church libraries.

Verna Martens, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams: Beginnings in Blue Creek* (Portage La Prairie, MB: by the author, 2007) paperback, 352 pp.

Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein,  
former Heritage Centre director.

Several months ago a number of Manitoban Mennonites and others traveled south to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mennonite congregational life at Blue Creek in Belize, a former British colony but now an independent country in Central America. This volume tells the story of how a missionary couple, Jake and Verna Martens, from southern Manitoba, began a missionary career in the Blue Creek area, and how in time they became leaders in forming a congregation of the Evangelical Mennonite Mission

Conference in 1966-67. The Martens had first come to Belize in 1958 to assist in the missionary work of Gospel Missionary Union, a move which coincided with the coming of a number of Old Colony families intending to begin a new settlement in the Blue Creek area.

The Martens family transition to the Blue Creek area came with a concern to assist families who had run into difficulties with their Old Colony community due to hesitancy about supporting some of the regulations governing that community. For the hesitants it meant excommunication, and the loss of ministries from their leaders in the very early pioneering period of Old Colony settlement at Blue Creek.

Very movingly but simply this volume describes the struggles of making that transition of resettling at Blue Creek, and of finding a foothold with the excommunicated families whom the Martens were hoping to assist in their new situation. Traveling was extremely difficult in wet weather particularly, large parts of the area were jungle, building materials were not easy to get, and shopping in distant towns added to problems of re-establishing their family in their own home (they had lived in a missionary house provided by GMU during their years with that mission), and creating a Bible study and worship pattern which could be appreciated by the former Old Colony families who did in fact accept the Martens with open arms.

It was sometimes also problematic to explain their moves and plans to their supporting EMMC board back in Canada because conditions were so different and the needs so unique and at times so overwhelming. Verna and Jake however moved ahead with a deep faith in having received God’s call for this work, great determination, ingenuity in dealing with primitive settlement conditions, a parallel concern for their own family’s well-being and with a strong compassion for any and all around them who would appeal for assistance in its many forms and situations. The many stories of hurdles to overcome and how it could be achieved have to be read to appreciate the sacrifices and sometimes very strenuous labour, and great patience too, which the Blue Creek ministry involved.

For the final period of their life at Blue Creek the Martens terminated their leading ministry in the congregation and established a farming business there. Dealing with jungle clearing was a new



experience, but again their project succeeded quite well. They also had become involved in setting up a clinic, a Coop store and a credit union, and continued to serve in the church but not in leadership. By 1981 they made their decision to return to Canada and see where God might lead them next. In January, 1982 they made their move and another chapter of their life would begin in Manitoba, at Portage La Prairie as it turned out.

Their connections with Old Colony people could not prevent confrontations and conflict with those who felt that the Martens venture was not in the interest of the Old Colony church, to say the least. The story of these dealings is told with great sensitivity and considerable understanding of what leaving a church and joining another meant for the excommunicated families, and for the church leadership which had to watch this happen.

The writing style makes for easy and fascinating reading. The strong emotions that went with many of the difficulties must often be sought between the lines. It will have been difficult to decide which stories should go in, and which would have to wait for another book. There is never any wringing of hands about problems in this volume. The book includes a number of very excellent photos reproduced in colour, but a map or two of the colony itself would make it a little easier to follow the story as it unfolded at Blue Creek.

We hope this volume will get a wide readership – it is deserving of nothing less.

### Polish Cemetery Project

The **Mennonitische Jugend** of Germany and **Klub Nowodworski** of Poland are launching a project, 4-19 August 2008, to renovate Mennonite graveyards in the Vistula Delta region. Fourteen volunteers from Poland, Germany and Holland have confirmed their participation in the project. Anyone who is willing to give assistance in the work is welcome. Equipment, accommodation, food and spare time activities are provided. The cost is 180 Euro per person. For further details visit [www.mjn-mennoniten.de](http://www.mjn-mennoniten.de), or e-mail [dietmar.classen@gmail.com](mailto:dietmar.classen@gmail.com).

*Robert Bobrowicz*

## SOUND IN THE LANDS II a Festival/Conference of Mennonites & Music June 4 - 8, 2009

**Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario**

Sound in the Lands II will explore Mennonite music across borders and boundaries. A sequel to the highly successful Sound in the Land 2004, this event is both festival with multiple concerts, performances, workshops, and an academic conference with papers and presentations which address issues of Mennonite-rooted peoples and their music making locally and globally. More information available on the internet at: [http://grebel.uwaterloo.ca/documents/soundinlandsII\\_000.pdf](http://grebel.uwaterloo.ca/documents/soundinlandsII_000.pdf) or .contact Carol Ann Weaver, Conrad Grebel University College, 140 Westmount Rd. N., Waterloo, ON N2L 3G6 CANADA or e-mail to: [caweaver@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:caweaver@uwaterloo.ca). Submission proposals will be accepted from June 1, 2008 until February 1, 2009.

### AMA Manitoba Day Award

The Association for Manitoba Archives second annual Manitoba Day Awards presentation was held on May 12, 2008. The Awards recognize users of archives who have completed an original work of excellence which contributes to the understanding and celebration of Manitoba history.

Ten individuals representing seven projects were recognized. One of the winners was Dr. Peter Letkemann for his biography on Ben Horch which was released in November. See page 5 of the December issue of the Mennonite Historian for details of the book and its author.

The award is a unique piece of art in the form of glass sheaves of wheat that symbolize Manitoba as a prairie province. "Wheat sheaves are symbols of the successful harvest associated with all that is nourishing and life-affirming," says Carole Pelchat, Chair of the Association's Board of Directors. "Wheat also provides the metaphor that we reap what we sow, reminding us that hard work brings its rewards." The Manitoba Day Awards celebrate the fact that Manitoba's documentary heritage is used. Thousands of people use the Province's archives every year. Users of archives are our reason for being. Without them there would be little point in keeping records."

Founded in 1981 the Association for Manitoba Archives represents 58 institutional archives. The Association's principle objectives are to enhance the quality of service provided by archives and archivists and to promote a better understanding and increased public awareness of the role and uses of archives. Both the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies and the Mennonite



Peter Letkemann receiving the AMA Manitoba Day Award presented by Paula Warsaba. Photo: Courtesy of the Association for Manitoba Archives.

Heritage Centre have been members of the Association since its founding.

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### MHV Annual Heritage Walk

Join us at the Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV) in Steinbach on Sunday **June 22**. Raise pledges in support of the Mennonite Heritage Village. (Pledge forms available from MHV.)

1:00-1:45 Registration

2:00-4:00 Fund-raising Walk

4:00-4:30 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary ceremony

4:30-6:30 Faspa

7:00-8:30 Program including Sommerfeld Mass Choir and a Hutterite choir

Admission: By Voluntary Donation.

Help us celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the formation of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, whose original purpose was to establish this museum.

*Bob Strong, MHV Director*

## **Book Reviews**

Hans Werner, *Imagined Homes, Soviet German Immigrants in Two Cities* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2007) paperback, 297 pages.

Reviewed by Harry Loewen, Professor Emeritus, Kelowna, B.C

This historical-sociological study deals with two ethnic German communities which came to Winnipeg, Canada, and Bielefeld, Germany, after the Second World War. It is a comparative study investigating the similarities and differences of how these immigrants were received by their host cities and how they sought to integrate in their surrounding societies. At first sight it may seem that comparing communities separated by time and space, might be like the proverbial “comparing apples and oranges,” but as Hans Werner demonstrates, his study provides insights that a book on just a single community would not provide.

The book has four parts with nine chapters, framed by an introduction and a brief summary and conclusion. The first part of the book deals briefly with the historical setting, including the political and war situation in Europe which created refugees and the need for their finding homes. The second part describes how the immigrants put down roots, first in Winnipeg and two decades later in Bielefeld. Owning their own homes was important to both groups. In Bielefeld, the resettlers “transplanted the tradition from the Soviet Union of helping each other build a home....In Winnipeg, immigrants bought homes very quickly, a move made possible by a buoyant economy and by pooling the family’s resources.” (127)

In the third part, called “Reproducing the Community,” the book deals with such things as family, religion and language. The part begins with a reference to Karl Fast who was separated from his wife and a child in Poland in 1944 and then in Canada was “able to reconstruct his family from the upheaval of World War II.” (131). There were many such separations among the immigrants coming to Canada and to Germany. As Werner shows, the family unit among the immigrants was a most important part of their feeling “at home.”

Religion and language were next in importance for the immigrants; the book shows how the immigrants sought to build their church life as soon as they found

jobs. But the preservation of their German language was as important for their ethnic identity and congregational fellowship. In Winnipeg, however, English eventually replaced German in the congregations; in Bielefeld the resettlers had to learn to speak “proper” German before they were fully accepted by the host society.

The fourth part is entitled “Participation” and deals with membership issues in the churches and non-religious organizations in which the immigrants became involved, including cultural institutions and the German news media. The author correctly observes that in eastern Europe the German-speaking groups felt superior to their slavic neighbours. In pre-Soviet times they were materially better off, were better educated, and as Germans identified with the culture of Germany. In Canada, on the other hand, the immigrants did not feel superior to their “English” neighbours, and in Bielefeld the Russian-Germans were seen as “Russians,” not a complimentary term. Integration was thus necessary, which was easier for the Winnipeggers than for the Bielefelders because Canada’s more open society welcomed strangers more readily than Germany.

The ethnic German immigrants that the book deals with belong generally to three religious denominations: Lutheran, Baptist and Mennonite, all coming from the eastern-block countries, primarily the Soviet Union. Including several, although similar, groups in one study, as mentioned, makes for interesting comparison, yet it also sets limits to in depth discussion and more varied narratives of the immigrants’ experiences. The Lutheran reader, for example, might have liked to see more stories of their groups, and the Mennonite or Baptist reader knows that there are many other experiences which have not been included. In other words, the reader, whose appetite has been whetted by the stories, might wish to have found more about his or her people’s experiences.

The author’s analysis of the two communities is based on a thorough knowledge of the ethnic Germans in the two cities. What seems ironic to him and the reader, no doubt, is that the immigrants in Winnipeg, where they had to learn English, were fairly soon easily integrated in their host society; the ethno-Germans coming to German Bielefeld found it more difficult (with some exceptions) to accept the culture and ways of their hosts. The cultural differences

between the resettlers (*Aussiedler*) and native Germans were too great and thus often too difficult to bridge.

There were also differences between the two receiving cities and the way they sought to integrate the newcomers. The post-World War II immigrants to Canada, after learning a new language, were more or less left to themselves to find employment, establish their homes, and become economically and socially successful. The newcomers to Bielefeld, on the other hand, were given much help and support by the German government to learn the language and finding accommodation and employment. But both the Winnipeggers and the Bielefelders had their religious and social networks for support and thus could rely on their “own people” to get on in a strange land. The ethnic Germans in Winnipeg accepted the ways of their neighbours fairly soon after their arrival, but the Bielefelders remained “strangers” in their new social and cultural environment much longer. Their living in the oppressive Soviet Union had not prepared them for the freer and more liberal conditions in the West.

The author has chosen not to deal (at least not in detail) with questions of politics and ideology and how they might have been factors in the immigrants’ experiences and in their subsequent life in the new countries. There is little about the war time experiences of the immigrants. For example, there were many among them who had served in the Soviet and/or the German military. The reader might ask how these experiences had shaped their lives and views. There were Mennonites who after the war had to go first to South America before coming to Canada because they had served in the German military. A few references to their experiences would have added to the richness of their story.

The author speaks of “sectarian” groups and issues when referring to the immigrants’ religion or faith. Terms like “sects” (*Sekten*) and “sectarian” may be acceptable in sociological discourse, but the *Aussiedler* believers would not wish to be referred to as “sects,” which for them has negative connotations, reminding them of the times when they were excluded from “acceptable and legitimate” religious groups. They simply think of themselves as *Gläubige*, religious believers, not sectarians. In a possible translation of the book into German, *Sekte* or *Sektierer* should not be used when

(cont’d on p. 6)